VOLUME 5
NUMBER 1
FANTASTIC ADVENTURES
JANUARY
1943

The MAN WITH FIVE LIVES By CLYDE WOODRUFF

fantastic ADVENTURES



The ICE QUEEN

By DON WILCOX

JANUARY

25c



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VOLUME 5
NUMBER 1



The Magic *of Mind*

WERE the great personages of the past victims of a stupendous hoax? Could such eminent men of the ancient world as Socrates, Pericles, and Alexander the Great have been deluded and cast under the spell of witchcraft—or did the oracles whom they consulted actually possess *a mysterious faculty of foresight?* That *the human mind can truly exert an influence over things and conditions* was not a credulous belief of the ancients, but a known and demonstrable fact to them. That there exists a wealth of infinite knowledge just beyond the border of our daily thoughts, which can be aroused and commanded at will, was not a fantasy of these sages of antiquity, but a dependable aid to which they turned in time of need.

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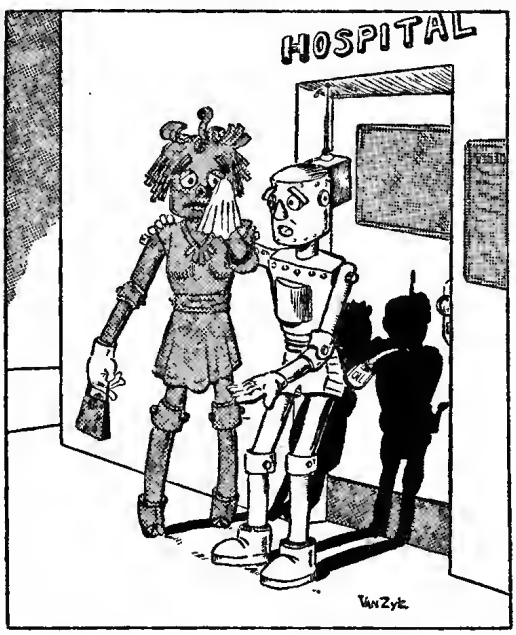
The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

IF you've ever seen a parade, you know what leads the band—a lovely drum majorette with plenty of strut and charm. Something to make the customers oh and ah with delight. Well, that's what we're doing with this January issue. We're starting off the new year with a "drum majorette" issue! Boiled down to terse English, we've fixed this issue up with the best stories we had on our desk. And with these stories to start with, let the rest of the year roll!—because it will!

FOR the first time, we are publishing *two* complete novels in one issue. If you don't believe it, just count pages! The first, the cover novel, is "The Ice Queen" by Don Wilcox. The cover was painted by Robert Gibson Jones, featuring the Jones girl again. The second is Clyde Woodruff's "The Man With Five Lives." Woodruff is a lad new to our pages—and we're mighty glad to get him!—but he's crashed with a novel his first time out, which is "sumpin."

MAYBE we were fascinated by the plot of this story, and amazed to find ourselves in it as an actual character. But when an author can do that convincingly, we know he must have something on the ball. If you don't agree that this is the most unusual story you have ever read, we'll never buy another word from Woodruff! And confidentially, he's a cinch to sell us plenty!



"Sorry, Darling. Doctor says, 'no *priority*, no *baby*!' "

TO add to the fine material in this issue, Robert Bloch's latest Lefty Feep story is one of his best. You'll be rolling on the floor when you finish this one. You see, Feep pays a visit to a pretty warm place, and he sure has some adventures with a guy named Satan!

DWIGHT V. SWAIN, who recently got married, and who even more recently went into the armed forces (which means when his material on hand is used up we've lost another top writer) got so serious about this husband business that he wrote a story about a "perfect" husband.

LEROY YERXA recently came into our office and blandly announced he'd quit his job. "Why?" we asked. The answer was that he'd decided to devote full time to writing fiction for his favorite readers. Well, maybe he's right—but we warned him he might starve to death! Anyway, here's another little yarn by this presumptuous youngster, and we wonder if you readers agree that he has plenty of nerve?

"MISTER TROUBLE" is the name of a new yarn by David Wright O'Brien. This is the lad who gets all those unusual ideas, so you can just sit down and read this one confidently. It'll hit you like it hit us.

INTRODUCTIONS are in order: Henry Norton is the newcomer, and he does a short story about a little fellow named Sammy. Sammy managed to call up something he termed "a noobus," and when he had it, he certainly didn't want it! So he had to get rid of it. Now Sammy was a brave little lad, but the wolf-god Anubis is one of the toughest cookies who ever stalked the deserts of Egypt, and that includes a guy named Rommel.

TO complete the lineup, we might mention Clee Garson's short, "Saunders' Strange Second Sight." Saunders certainly saw a lot of funny things, and for awhile they amused him no end, but then he got a slant at himself in a mirror, and bingo, it wasn't so funny!

(Concluded on page 191)

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The ICE QUEEN

by DON WILCOX

Somewhere in these frozen wastes was a fortune in furs. But guarding them were a girl, a white tiger and a lost world



With upraised arm, knife poised to strike, the Fireman came at him



IF I could only paint this story, instead of writing it, I wouldn't have any trouble getting started. I'd paint a wide green sea full of white icebergs. That would be Baffin Bay. A strip of Greenland coast would show along the right side of the picture, mostly white but with a few patches of bright green verdure. In the center of the picture would be our old two-masted brig, *Aurora,* skimming along gracefully in a northerly direction through a clear channel.

Those two prominent fur-clad figures at the rail, gazing at the coastline through pocket telescopes, would be Lady Lucille Lorruth and Captain French, searching for signs of the Lady's long-lost husband, Lord Lorruth, and his party of fur traders, who entered this wilderness of ice five years ago and failed to return.

The face of Lady Lucille would be reddened with cold; the face of Captain French, dark with whiskers and purplish from too much drink.

A tinge of pink would show in every surface that faced the right of the picture, for the sun of the arctic summer would be somewhere off to the east, skimming low over the mountainous Greenland coast.

I painted many such pictures during the early weeks of our expedition, before the outdoor temperatures went below zero to stay. I was Lady Lucille's official artist and I relished my work. This would be a lark, and a rare opportunity. And when I returned I would be able to give illustrated lecture tours.

My first surprise was my acquaintance with Lady Lucille. It is one thing to know a famous person by reputation, but quite another to develop an intimate friendship of the sort that must exist on board ship. Lady Lucille Lorruth was exceedingly friendly to me. She had the highest praise for my simplest sketches. With childlike exuberance she went about the deck displaying these works to Captain French and Steve Pound, the mate, and any of the crew members that happened along.

"Our journey is bound to be successful," she would say, "because we have such a wonderful artist."

"Very, very excellent," Captain French would comment with a big hearty laugh. He was quick to share any interest or enthusiasm of Lady Lucille Lorruth.

Soon I found myself more or less subject to the whims of this vivacious lady who headed our expedition. Though I may have spent a full day at work over the drawing board, I would quickly comply if she suggested another sketch or two to be added to my day's output. Perhaps it was our first glimpse of the northern lights. Perhaps it was a patchwork carpet of ice floes sliding along, forming fantastic designs.

During those early weeks Lady Lucille's slightest wish, I may say, was my greatest pleasure. But I had not yet been fully disillusioned as to the true character of Lady Lucille Lorruth. It took the loss of a life—the life of Inez, the Lady's personal attendant. But that comes later . . .

ONE day, after we had left the coast of Greenland, I found a picture thumbtacked to my drawing board which I had not drawn. Shorty Barnes, the comical little deck hand with the saucer eyes, popped in the door after awhile, and I asked him about it.

He blinked. "Didn't you give me strict orders not to destroy no sketches, no matter where I found 'em?"

"This isn't one of my pictures," I said.

"Huh?" He wondered. "Thought it looked like you was slippin' a bit."

"Where'd you find it?"

"Out by the bulwarks driftin' along in the wind."

I stared at the sketch. "I can't even make out what it is. Looks like a woman riding on a horse—or is it a polar bear?"

"Or a four-legged broomstick ridin' a witch, or versa vesuvious," said Shorty. He shrugged and walked away.

Somehow this illustration, crude though it was, must mean something. That was the thought which kept turning over in my mind. I am enough of an artist to know that people don't draw things without a reason. Even when the school boy sketches faces in the sand with his bare toes he is trying to express something, whether he knows it or not.

That night I feel asleep listening to the irregular bump, bump, bump of the loose ice against the hull of the ship. Our easy sailing might come to an end sooner than we expected.

The next day I thumbtacked the sketch near the door of the mess room, knowing that everyone on board would

see it at some time or another. Then I watched through the noon hour.

Shorty spied it and he pranced around on his bandy bowlegs, lecturing to a crowd of half a dozen sailors about it. He said it was a mystery. Someone must be trying to run competition to the official artist.

"Jim McClurg said it wasn't his work," said Shorty.

The sailors didn't argue that point. They reckoned that when I painted a four-legged object you could tell whether it was meant for a hippopotamus or a saw-horse. And if I painted a girl you'd know it was a girl, not a witch or a mermaid.

One of the fellows thought he might touch the picture up a bit if someone would lend him a pencil. But just then the three burliest, toughest sailors, the Frabbel brothers, came thudding down the deck.

The Frabbels pushed the rest of the crowd away so they could see. The sketch interested them only slightly. They dismissed it with a few obscene remarks and followed the other sailors into the mess room.

AN HOUR later I noticed that the sketch caught the attention of Lady Lucille. She was being escorted to the Captain's private dining room for her customary early afternoon dinner. On one side of her was the roly-poly purple-faced captain, on the other was her thin, nervous, red-eyed, thirty-five year old maid, Inez.

Of the three, Lady Lucille was as capable as any of walking the decks unsupported, for her maid was too frail to withstand a strong wind, and the captain had already begun his day's drinking. But it was a matter of daily ceremony for the two of them to parade her to dinner. It was Captain French's daily opportunity to remind us that he was a person of great wealth and importance; it was Inez Dorster's ritual of obeisance to nobility.

The picture caught Lady Lucille's attention. But half a glance caused her to turn her head haughtily. Her shoulders swayed stiffly through her fur coat as she quickened her pace past the mess room door.

"What was that?" the captain grumbled, craning back at the picture.

"Something to be removed," Lady Lucille snapped. "Not now. Take me to dinner."

She stomped away in angry dignity, as if she were a queen who had been insulted from the streets.

There was no good reason that she should have mistaken the picture for something indecent, although, as I have noted, it was difficult to interpret. But here was a fair sample of Lady Lucille's behavior—her anxiety to demonstrate that she was a much loftier person than the common mortals around her. She would go far out of her way to exhibit delicacies of taste or temperament. And if she became angry over some trifle, everything would come to a standstill. The captain would have to clamp down on the sailors' normal harsh talk and profanity from one end of the ship to the other because Lady Lucille was upset. As such times no one dared to indulge in any cursing except Lady Lucille herself.

The sketch hung on the door for half the afternoon. From my drawing board by the deck rail I could watch it. Cedric Peterson, the geographer—"Professor" as the sailors called him—strolled along with an open book in his hands. He raised one of his bristling black eyebrows a trifle, but sauntered on, uninterrupted in his reading.

Malonski, the bald-headed, big-toothed steward, limped past with a tray of food for the stowaway, who had

been imprisoned below soon after his presence had been discovered.

Late that afternoon Steve Pound came trotting by, just off duty. The picture arrested him instantly. He jerked out the thumbtack, pocketed the paper, and walked off.

I knew, then, that Steve had drawn it.

CHAPTER II

A Girl on a Tiger

STEVE POUND was a hard worker and a square-shooter—as honest and as straightforward as any man on ship. He would take over an extra work shift for a sick sailor quicker than anyone. He was not one to waste his time dabbling with hobbies, and I couldn't conceive of his having acquired a sudden interest in art.

Well, my curiosity got the best of me and I went to Steve.

"How did you happen to draw it?" I asked him.

"So you were the one who found it," he said. "Come into my room so we can talk."

He closed the door back of us. I noticed the mysterious look in his eyes —a strange glint that contrasted with the usual clear-eyed, square-jawed confidence of his countenance. Steve had spent most of his thirty years on the ocean. He was a solid conservative seaman.

He didn't doubt that these newfangled ships called steamboats might be useful in due time. But he had never stepped aboard a steamboat and he doubted that he ever would. He'd heard all the arguments; but he had heard arguments, too, that some day boats would fly through the air—and that was more than he could believe. Like most of us, living in the middle eighteen-hundreds, he knew when he had something solid—and that something was ocean navigation in the traditional manner.

Would he ever leave the sea? Perhaps some day, long enough to build a little cottage on the Newfoundland coast, and find a wife to keep it for him, so that he would have a home between voyages and for his old age.

Steve unfolded the paper and gazed at the sketch.

"You won't believe me, Jim," he said, "but I can trust you. I am going to tell you exactly what I saw that night as we pulled away from the shore of Greenland."

"If you saw it I'll believe it," I said.

"Do you remember that wide glacier? It ended in a cliff of ice along the shore line that paralleled our course for four and a half hours."

"I saw the first hour of it," I recollected, "before I turned in."

"That's where I saw it—this strange, unbelievable thing. Maybe you remember I was late coming off my watch that night. I held on because I kept seeing it."

"What?" I was becoming exasperated.

"I thought at first it was someone riding a polar bear—the hugest bear I'd ever seen. But it wasn't. It was a tiger."

"Tiger?"

"A *white* tiger!" Steve Pound was looking at me steadily. He was in deadly earnest. "If it had happened only once I wouldn't have believed it myself."

"I should think not."

"But I'm not a man to see apparitions, and when I saw it the second time, and caught a clear view of the rider, I knew my eyes weren't fooling me."

"With a rider?" I gasped. "What *are* you talking about?"

"I said you would not believe me but I'm telling you just what I saw. The rider was a girl. I caught a full view of her, riding past the rising moon. She was dressed like something out of a show or a circus—"

I INTERRUPTED to doubt whether Steve Pound had ever seen a circus. But he was too intent on this imaginary image to be bothered.

"Something like a girl I saw in a pageant, one time, up in Norway. She had gold sandals and a skirt of red fox furs and gold breastplates and a helmet with gold wings—"

"You've been dreaming."

"And there was a flashy red robe that fluttered back from her shoulders, and she was pretty—awful pretty. If I had all the words in all the books I couldn't tell you how pretty. I mean it, Jim. I—"

"You saw all this through your telescope?"

"I did. She rode right along the dangerous edge of the glacier, and that white tiger of hers would leap the gaps like a bird."

"Did it have teeth? What color were its eyes? Did you count the whiskers?"

Steve's cheeks flushed with anger.

"Don't get mad," I said. "But you've just had a bad dream—"

"It wasn't bad."

"And you've let it work on your imagination. We were a safe half mile from that ledge of ice when I saw it."

"We edged closer," said Steve. "We were sailing steady and I took a chance, so I could get a better view. I steered within thirty yards. With the telescope I could see the snowflakes fly back from that tiger's feet, all colored against the northern lights."

"It's a wonder you didn't crash us. Was anyone with you?"

"Not a soul. The elder Frabbel had played off his watch. The whole blooming show was all mine."

"I'm sure of it," I said.

Steve Pound stopped, the reason being that he doubted whether there was any use going on. And he was right, because I was fully convinced he was having delusions.

I wanted to walk out and call the ship's physician. But Steve Pound ordered me to sit down.

"We haven't finished," he said. "Not till you give me your opinion. Do you think the girl was following us? Often she seemed to be riding like the wind right toward our ship, especially whenever we drifted straight toward a point. What do you make of it, Jim?"

"I don't know," I said. "I don't know anything about it."

"I've a hunch she wanted to come aboard," said Steve. "Maybe she had a message for us."

For a long time I sat in silence. Finally I said, "*White* tiger? Who ever heard of a white tiger?"

"I've been wondering about that," said Steve earnestly. "Is there such a thing as a polar tiger?"

"No."

"Or a lion—or a panther—or a leopard?"

"Of course not."

"I wish I had called you," said Steve. "No one knows much about this Far North. We're going to see some strange things and it'll take an artist like you, Jim McClurg, to capture them. I tried when I made that sketch, but I can't draw. And besides, when I tried to put it down in a picture, the whole thing began to seem so impossible—"

"It *is* impossible, Steve."

"All right, Jim, you'll see for yourself," Steve said hotly. "We aren't making any more knots than that girl and her tiger. If she comes our way

again, I'll call you. If she doesn't—you can forget it."

Exactly one week later the apparition returned and I saw it for myself.

CHAPTER III

Suicide

BEFORE I can record the instance of our meeting with that strange pair, the girl and the tiger who were shadowing our ship, I must go back to note a few items about Captain French's wealth and Lady Lorruth's ambitions, the secret terrors of Inez the maid, and the sullen silence of the stowaway we had picked up.

I still don't know at what port the stowaway boarded our ship, but sometime during those two weeks of skirting the Greenland coast we were surprised to find him hiding among the barrels in the hold.

The cook, Malonski, and Steve Pound, the mate, dragged him out on deck and we all got a look at him. He was tall and gaunt, and young—twenty-five at the most—rather too young to be a habitual tramp and vagabond. His ragged overcoat might have been rescued from an incinerator. His hair was very black, and very grimy. But his face showed no lack of spirit. I don't think I ever saw so much fire in the eyes of any man.

"Call the Captain," said Steve Pound, "and Lady Lorruth, too."

The whole crew gathered around staring at this rebellious looking human. From his sullen glare he must have thought we were going to kill him.

We backed away to make room for the captain who escorted Lady Lorruth into the stowaway's presence. The captain started blustering, but the real authority was Lady Lucille Lorruth. This was her ship, and her expedition. The pompous captain was more decorative than useful; his reputation as a wealthy bachelor merchant had lent a certain prestige to this rescue party. But Lady Lucille did most of the whip-cracking.

It wasn't hard to guess her attitude toward the stowaway from the start. This unkempt stranger was an intruder. He had no business here. Our food stores were limited. He came aboard to thieve a passage, or food, or both.

"Who are you?" Lady Lorruth asked.

In slow heavy words the ragged fellow replied, "My name in Gandl."

"Gandl!" Lady Lorruth's attractive face twisted with suspicion. In her angry moments the narrow stripe of white hair which crowned her blue-black carefully groomed tresses, seemed to emphasize the blaze of white in her narrow eyes. Her fury was an artist's study: thin flaring nostrils, lips that tightened over her teeth with a hint of brutality. She relished this situation, I think, because it gave her an opportunity to play her ugly authority, causing the most innocent sailor in her audience to quail with feelings of guilt.

"Gandl!" she repeated. "I'll have the captain set you adrift on an iceberg, Gandl, as soon as it suits my pleasure. Straighten up . . . I said, straighten up!"

The stowaway was already standing as straight as a ruler, though his miserable clothes gave him an aspect of sagging. Lady Lucille's command failed to move him. The captain jumped to his chance, throwing a heavy fist to the stowaway's jaw, knocking him off his feet.

"Get up!" Lady Lucille snarled. "On your feet! There, now stand *straight!*"

The stowaway rose slowly and adjusted his clothes. His expression re-

mained the same—silent, fiery defiance. But Lady Lucille decided that his obedience had improved. She shot a few more questions at him.

"Where did you come from?"

"Back there."

"Where? Greenland—Labrador—Newfoundland?"

"I don't know. It was a long way back." His voice was thick with an accent that was new to me.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'll help you sail through the ice."

LADY LORRUTH glanced at the captain, then at the crew. She tossed her head arrogantly. "We don't need your help. We'll take care of you when the time comes. . . . Captain French, make him fast with chains."

It was several days, then, before Gandl came out of the hold.

We had a week of dodging an ice pack that was bearing down upon us from the north. Daily it grew thicker. We fought to take advantage of every open channel. If we had had a steamboat, even a small tug, it would have been easy. But our brig was equipped only with sails and so we were being tossed about at the caprice of nature.

That was the week that we followed close along the shores of Greenland—the week that Steve Pound saw the strange pair who were following us, and told me about the picture he had drawn.

And on one of those days came the first tragedy of our expedition—the loss of Inez Dorster.

It happened during Lady Lucille's dinner hour.

For some unaccountable reason only the captain had accompanied Lady Lucille to dinner that afternoon. Her maid had been acting strangely, carrying on with much muffled crying and always looking sick from worry. Everyone supposed she was scared over the approaching dangers from the ice. It was bumping the sides of the ship almost constantly. The prospect of being ice-bound through a long arctic winter was a gloomy one for all of us.

Inez Dorster went overboard at two-ten in the afternoon.

Malonski, the cook, saw her fall past his window. He began to shout in Polish, and he fell over a table and a chair on his way to the alarm bell.

For two or three minutes no one could make out what had happened.

Malonski finally made two of the Frabbels understand, and in his eagerness to drive them to the rescue—since he himself couldn't swim—he pushed one of them overboard.

By that time a dozen or more of us had rushed up to see what all the noise was about. The captain missed the whole event, being preoccupied with food and, especially, drink. But Steve Pound, who was supposed to be sleeping, arrived on the scene in time to help rescue Rake Frabbel from his icy plunge.

As to Inez Dorster, she was back there somewhere but we couldn't see her. We were all too late. We circled back, and Steve and Shorty let down a dory, and young Frabbel and I went with them.

WE SEARCHED for the body for two hours, but in the end we had to give up. The ice floes were sweeping down thick and fast with the current. It was a constant fight to keep our dory from being smashed to kindling wood. We were half full of water when we caught the hooks and made our way back to the deck of the *Aurora*.

The captain asked Professor Peterson to read a passage from the Bible and make a prayer, as a sort of funeral service. We were all pretty solemn with the shock of the thing, and espe-

cially sorry for Lady Lucille, who looked as if she wanted to cry but couldn't.

More than anything else we were mystified. A woman who has been a faithful maid for ten or fifteen years doesn't suddenly commit suicide unless the world has turned awful black —and I couldn't see that it had.

But there was no time to wonder about it. "All hands on deck!" was the cry from the bridge. The ice was closing in on us. For hours to come, every man of us was kept busy with hooks and anchors, fighting off the trap.

"We could use a dozen more hands!" Steve Pound yelled, as he flung his weight against a pole, barely thrusting a floater aside. "We could sure use that stowaway."

The captain made no comment. But a few minutes later he returned to the bow leading the gaunt, dark, half-starved figure of Gandl.

"You said you wanted to help," the captain growled. "All right, we'll see if you're any good."

Within ten minutes an undercurrent of whispering went over the noisy deck. "That damned stowaway is better than any three men."

It was true. Whenever Shorty and I had a chance to go forward for a new catch with our anchor we'd get a glimpse of Gandl at work.

He was out in front of the ship's prow, leaping from one floater to another, prying and splitting them with an iron bar, breaking the path. He was surer on his feet than any mountain goat, and quicker than a bobcat.

I wished that Lady Lucille could have seen him now. But she had gone to her room to be alone with her sorrows.

Gandl and Steve Pound were the last two men to quit. But at last there was a grinding reverberation that rumbled through the ship. A massive wedge of ice had slid right under our hull. We were lifted bodily. Then—clunk —we came to a dead stop.

The ice pack was tight around us. We were three miles from land, but the space was rapidly filling with solid ice, so that the continent seemed to spread right out and claim us.

That night everyone was so dog-tired that extra drinks were served all around. The Frabbel brothers bought some of the extras off their fellow sailors, and got drunk and wanted to fight everyone. They stormed around, yelling and cursing and boasting. Then one of them spied the stowaway and started dragging him out on the deck to give him a beating.

But Steve Pound picked up a crowbar and tamed all three of the quarrelsome Frabbels and put them to sleep for the night and a good share of the next day.

CHAPTER IV

News from the Dead

BY THE end of the week we decided that it was useless to try to break our way out. We must wait until the ice broke of its own accord before we could pursue our journey. It was a demoralizing situation.

It took Steve Pound to rally our spirits. He insisted that Captain French put us on a rigorous daily schedule of exercise and amusements.

A part of my daily routine was devoted to doing a portrait of Lady Lucille Lorruth. She decided that she wanted a picture of herself, dressed in sumptuous furs, sitting on deck.

The background of the picture was to be the field of ice that inclosed us. Since the temperature was seldom above freezing and often below zero we

could only work about an hour at a stretch.

But these hours were full of conversations—some of them highly confidential. Lady Lucille needed someone to talk with, now, more than ever. She was deep in troubles — I had not guessed how deep.

Those troubles went right into the portrait. Try though I would to soften the picture by retouching it with warm colors, something evil crept into it—hardness of greed and the anxiety of secret ambitions.

I purposely ruined the picture one day so I could start over.

On my second trial I made an effort to keep Lady Lucille in a certain mood which I thought would be appropriate to this work. After all, I reasoned, there must be much in her character that is truly noble. She is risking her life to make this expedition.

Why?

Purely for her love and devotion to her dead husband.

What could be more beautiful than an affection so enduring? Ah—that was the theme that my portrait must capture. My painting would fill this face with longing and hope and infinite loyalty.

"Keep your eyes on the distant mountains," I advised. "Can you imagine what hardships an explorer must endure, crossing that rugged terrain?"

"You mean my husband?"

"I often think of him," I said, painting rapidly as I talked. "What a relief it would be to him and his party if we could find them in time. . . . There is always a chance, you know, that they've survived somehow."

"Did I doubt it?" she replied, rather too curtly.

"It would be miraculous, after five years. But if we should succeed, Lady Lucille, I would always believe it a miracle wrought by your faith—your love—your prayers."

"I never pray," she retorted coldly. Again her eyes were narrow and hard.

I CONTINUED to talk with her in terms of hope. It was difficult; like all the others aboard, I felt certain that we would never find Lord Lorruth alive. But like the rest of the crew, I had supposed that Lady Lucille was firm in her faith; that she had come believing and hoping we would find him alive.

All at once I saw that I was mistaken. She didn't believe any such thing.

"Your husband is a very courageous man," I would say. I would purposely stress the word *is,* to imply that her husband was still living.

"Yes," Lady Lorruth would reply. "He was one of the bravest gentlemen in England."

Note that I quote her as answering in terms of the past rather than the present. I am sure she was not aware she was doing this. But it happened over and over again.

"My husband was a favorite of all the noblemen," she would say. "He was a personal friend of the King."

See what I was driving at? I was proving to myself that Lady Lorruth knew at heart that her husband must be dead.

I kept her gazing at the mountains, but her conversation would bound away from the subject of her lost husband.

"Those mountains are wealth," she would say, and the avarice of her heart would creep right into her portrait. "There must be hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of furs out there waiting to be claimed. Lord Lorruth must have gathered a fortune for me this time."

If I succeeded in diverting her from a contemplation of furs she might lapse

into a theme which seemed to give her much mental torture.

"What will the people back in England say when they learn that my maid committed suicide? How can I explain? What will the gossips whisper—about *me?*"

There seemed to be a very guilty conscience at work here.

But if I failed to enrich my portrait with a mood of tragic devotion, I succeeded in capturing some of this inner turmoil. In my own mind I came to the conclusion that Lady Lorruth was sailing under false pretenses. Why had she come? Not because she believed her husband to be alive. It must be from some other motive.

SINCE we were locked against the upper shore of Greenland, we began making daily expeditions on foot. And luckily so, for we discovered, on the point of a cliff, a landmark.

It was a point that most ships would be forced to pass.

The landmark was a cairn of stones standing twelve feet tall. Our sailors dug into the cairn and there they found a steel box, tied closed with a wire.

Inside the box was a letter addressed, "Lady Lucille Lorruth."

You can imagine the excitement on board our ship while we waited on the deck for Lady Lucille to emerge from her cabin to tell us the news.

I was prepared for her apathetic reaction. When she made an effort to respond to the sailors' curiosity and enthusiasm, her manner was a sham. Her show of hope rang false.

"He passed this way," she said. "I think we shall find him if we keep going. He speaks of — ah — furs. An abundance of them. I will tell you more —later."

The sailors were reverently silent. They seemed to be saying, "Poor Lady Lucille. She still thinks we'll find him alive."

The captain rubbed his whiskers dubiously. "Is the letter dated?"

"It bears a date," said Lady Lucille, "of five years ago. But I have faith that everything will be all right. Yes, we'll push right on, as soon as the ice breaks for us. Meanwhile, you must all keep hoping for the best, and—ah—*praying.*"

Her shallow voice carried thin conviction. But the sailors were touched, and she had made the most of their sympathies.

However, her eye caught mine just as she said "praying" and I saw her cheeks flush with anger. She must have read my distrust.

She turned swiftly, clutched the letter to her breast, and hurried off to her room.

CHAPTER V

White Tiger to the Rescue

THE next day the further news from the letter was revealed to us. A gift was waiting for Lady Lorruth—a gift of furs. It had been hidden, according to the letter, in a cache on the next cliff to the north.

This news gave us a tremendous lift of spirit. It gave us something to work for, something in reach while we were still locked in the ice. Immediately Captain French planned a small expedition which was to proceed on foot to the appointed spot.

When I heard that Shorty Barnes was one of the chosen party I couldn't resist tagging along. Shorty Barnes had won the record of falling down more times than any other man on board. I saw in him possibilities of a series of comic cartoons. He was built on the lines of an apple dumpling, his eyes

resembled those of a curious pike, and he was invariably getting himself into trouble. He didn't know it, but I had fifteen or twenty sketches of him in characteristic poses—tumbling over the table, being frightened on a night watch, jerked off his feet by the anchor he tossed at an ice drift, and so on.

I had a hunch that the boys would let Shorty take the risks if any were to be taken, and I was right. When we reached the second cliff our way was blocked by a twenty-foot wall of ice. It was a short cut and if we could scale it, it would save us an hour of trudging around a small bay. However, before it was a five-foot neck of water, like a moat in front of an icy castle.

We threw an ice hook to the top of the twenty-foot ledge and it caught fast.

"All right, Shorty, up the rope you go," said Captain French.

Shorty was game. He went up the rope hand over hand, but just as he reached the top of the twenty-foot ascent a strange thing happened.

The pack of ice cracked and split wide open. It spread about four feet in one sudden vertical break. It was like an explosion. The anchor was left without support. Shorty, rope, and anchor and all went down, smack into the water.

Comedy turned to near tragedy on the spot. Everyone of us was dressed in heavy furs. A leap into that icy pool would mean coming to grips with death itself.

Shorty wailed in a blood-chilling tone. But there was hope in that outcry, and in his clumsy struggle—as though he had decided this was a good time to learn to swim.

I supposed Steve Pound would be the first man to the rescue.

But it was our stowaway who plunged. He went in like a seal. You would think he'd lived in icy waters all his life. In a moment he was out again with ice collecting on his bristling black stubble and a deathly white Shorty in his arms.

Now the only thing to do was to send part of our party back with Shorty as swiftly as possible.

NO FURS were found. Nothing was accomplished that would give Lady Lucille any satisfaction.

But what made the greatest impression on all of us was that our stowaway had proved himself, for the second time, a hero.

Lady Lorruth was not impressed. She did not even pretend to be. She had taken an icy dislike to Gandl from the first.

After he had helped so valiantly in our fight with the floe ice, I supposed he would gain her favor. But instead, the relationship had taken a turn for the worse, owing to a very frank and blunt statement of Gandl's—a speech that was frightfully shocking to Lady Lucille's nerves.

It had happened that very morning before we started off to look for the furs. Gandl was no longer in chains. He was sharing Shorty's cabin—an accommodation that he had certainly earned, and that Steve Pound had arranged he should have.

When Lady Lucille announced that there would be a search for the furs, Gandl was on hand to volunteer.

"But we won't find furs," Gandl had asserted in his thick drawling voice. "Five years is too long. They will be gone."

"I have faith in my husband," Lady Lucille snapped in a haughty manner.

"He may be gone too," Gandl said very solemnly. His innocent manner was genuine. He believed that Lady Lucille had not faced this possibility.

Her anger was rising, but she tried to silence him with a sarcastic retort. "You know entirely too much."

"Yes, I do. I know why the other lady chose to die. And you know, too. Because I heard—"

"Hsssh!" Steve Pound warned, and Gandl fell silent.

But Lady Lucille turned a dozen different colors and her arms stiffened like vibrating metal.

"It's a lie! It's a lie!" she cried, and she shook her head so violently that the flesh of her cheeks and throat became a shapeless shuddering. As the captain hastily led her away we could all hear her vicious snarl, "I can't stand that man. I can't stand him."

But in spite of Lady Lucille, Gandl was a valuable addition to our crew. Twice in the presence of danger he had proved himself a man of phenomenal ability.

THE very next day there were signs that the ice was about to break up and set us free. At noon Lady Lorruth called the stowaway for a conference. And the whisper went around the ship that she had changed her attitude toward him.

Steve and I were present, and I must admit that she was doing her best to seem friendly to the slow, bewildered, ragged young man.

"Gandl, they tell me you helped bring Shorty Barnes back?" she said.

"Yes."

"Then you didn't help the men search for the furs?"

"No."

"They tell me that you were very confident at climbing over the ice," she said.

"Thank you, your ladyship."

"I'll send you back," said Lady Lorruth. "You will go by yourself. Where the others failed, you may succeed. I want you to go and look for the hidden furs."

"After five years, I do not think—"

"Never mind what you think. You are to start at once, and look thoroughly."

"I shall start at once," said Gandl with a respectful bow.

And he did. Within an hour he disappeared from sight over the hummock ice. And that was when Lady Lorruth again took personal command of the ship.

"Captain French, I want you to get us out of here at once. Get the whole crew to work. Use the dynamite if necessary. Get us into that channel. Anything, just so we break free."

The captain looked puzzled.

"We are getting free," he said dubiously. "Within an hour—"

"We have not an hour to waste. Not even a minute. We must go now."

"But what about Gandl? You sent him on an errand. If you think he'll find a cache of furs—"

"Didn't you tell me you found the cache empty?" said Lady Lucille.

"Yes, but what if Gandl—"

"Don't ask stupid questions. Hurry."

We worked like beavers, everyone of us, chopping and dynamiting, risking our lives to force a path through the ice.

After three hours we were free. We broke into a long crooked channel with ice floes grinding and scraping on all sides.

The channels widened. The gales pushed us along northward. We were almost out in the open.

"What about Gandl?" Shorty shouted. "He's still over there somewhere. Aren't we going to wait for Gandl?"

None of us knew what to say. This looked like deliberate murder. Out of the corners of our eyes we watched

Lady Lorruth. Her lips tightened brutally.

Shorty began to pounce around the deck trying to attract someone's attention. "Gandl! Gandl! What about him? He'll get left. What's the idea —"

Shorty's wail was cut short suddenly. The captain biffed him across the head, and Shorty went toppling down against the rail.

That was a moment of sullen silence for all of us. It was a true test of the captain and Lady Lorruth. All of us saw their true colors now.

NO ONE said very much. No one dared. Shorty Barnes got up and started limping around the deck. His eyes were deep with hurt and resentment. We were watching him. He walked into the bow, stood there for a long time staring out into the deep.

Many of the crew were still murmuring over what had happened when they noticed that Shorty was pointing. There was a narrow passage ahead. A peninsula from the island where the furs were supposed to be hidden jutted out about half a mile and threatened to block our path. A channel left between it and a field of pack ice looked to be no more than thirty yards wide. The danger in that narrow pass was crowding down on us.

The gale had stiffened. We were making five or six knots. If we could clear the pass, all was well. But for all we knew there might be a floor of ice beneath the surface.

Steve Pound studied the current through his pocket telescope. The captain shouted orders to everyone.

But what Shorty Barnes was pointing at was neither the narrow pass nor the current but something far more breathtaking.

He began to mumble, "What is that thing? Come here. Come here, George. Do you see what I see?"

George and Bill and a whole cluster of crewmen saw. It might have been a statue in ice. It might have been the largest polar bear that we ever encountered. At the distance of one hundred and fifty yards we could not yet be sure that it was anything alive—only that it was something shaped like a massive white animal.

Shorty edged close to me.

"All right, Jim, get your sketch pad. That's what I told you about the other day."

I obeyed—reluctantly. But by the time I began drawing I knew what I was sketching—not some ice imitation, but a real live *polar tiger*.

The big beast crept slowly toward the water's edge.

Some of the sailors had gone for firearms. For once neither the captain nor Lady Lorruth had the presence of mind to give any orders.

Suddenly the animal turned and bounded up over the icy bank and disappeared.

A moment later it reappeared at the top of the ledge. Now it bore a rider.

How in the name of high heaven it was possible for these two creatures to be inhabiting the waste of ice was more than anyone could guess. But we all saw. We couldn't deny our eyes. And it was the most breathtaking sight I've ever looked upon—that beautiful white tiger was being ridden by a breathtakingly beautiful girl!

I dropped my sketch pad. The men forgot about their guns. We were the statues of ice, then, gazing as we would have gazed if a fairyland of stars had been floating past us.

The girl rode southward along the mountainous peninsula, and we crowded astern to watch her.

Now she bounded out of sight, now

she reappeared around a bulwark of hummock ice.

At last she stopped, some five hundred yards to our rear. She reached down to help someone else onto the tiger. It was our stowaway, Gandl. She came racing back with him.

BUT this time our ship was nosing straight into the narrow channel and a swift current was bearing us forward. In our confusion we entrusted ourselves to Steve Pound. It was up to him to steer us through this perilous pass. But we were too much hypnotized to watch him. All eyes were on the tiger's race to meet us.

It was a race. The girl was speeding back to us, bringing Gandl. Just as we passed through the narrows, that strange white tiger bounded over the last hill of ice and tore down the bank in a flurry of flying snow.

The beast stopped short of the water's edge. The girl clung to its furry neck. Her other arm released Gandl. He bounded down, raced across the last few steps of the icy shore slipped into the water, clothes and all. A moment later he climbed up the laddar and was safely aboard.

But we were no longer paying any attention to Gandl. Rather we were drinking in the picture before us—our nearest view of the tiger and its rider retreating along the promontory of ice.

I tried to catch the details of color and costume. Already the girl and her mount had turned to race away.

As Steve Pound had said, she was like something out of a Viking story book. Her gold helmet was adorned with wings. She was wearing jeweled breast plates. She was bearing a gold sword. Her wrists were ornamented with bracelets and I was aware that there was a tinkling of bells in rhythm with the movement of her arms. There seemed to be something familiar in this ring, but at the moment I couldn't catch what is was.

The girl was certainly not dressed for arctic weather. The flowing red robe fluttered back from her shoulders loosely. The beautiful skirt of red fox fur was much too short to protect her bare knees.

But all in all it was as bright and gay a costume as one could hope to see in a circus.

It gave me the feeling that the whole spectacle—girl, tiger, costume and all—must have somehow escaped from the world's finest trained animal show—or was this snow-covered country a land of ghosts?

Lady Lucille's outcry broke our gasping silence. Pointing at the girl's costume, she shrieked, "My furs! They're mine—I know it! *My furs! My furs!*"

CHAPTER VI

The Captain Confides

WE WERE a deckful of question marks.

Nobody could make sense out of what had just happened. The girl had ridden completely out of sight. Only the foottracks convinced us that what we had seen was real.

But here was Gandl. We couldn't doubt him.

At the moment Gandl was glaring daggers at Lady Lucille. Everyone of us guessed how he felt. For all we knew, he may have believed that all of us had tried to give him the slip. But no one offered him any explanation.

Lady Lorruth continued to stare at the bank of ice where the rider had disappeared.

Suddenly she turned on Gandl. In-

stead of making excuses for her treachery, she faced him accusingly.

"Who was that human?" she demanded. "Where did she come from? Why did she bring you back here?"

Gandl's silence was defiant.

Lady Lucille's eyes blazed. "Those furs she had—they were mine. I know they were. Lord Lorruth described them in his letter. Who is she? Why did she dare—"

"To bring me back?" Gandl said quietly. "Perhaps so you could send me on another errand."

His voice was deep and intense with suppressed emotion. The situation was charged with the electricity of hatred. It was something that we all felt. If I had been drawing it in a caricature, Lady Lorruth would have had a knife upraised and Gandl would have had his fist clenched and his teeth bared.

So perfect was his control that he simply stood motionless. His drenched clothes were turning to ice.

"Don't talk to him now," said Captain French. "Give him a chance to change before he freezes to death."

"But I insist that he tell me—"

"Later," the captain growled. "We'll have him talkin' in due time."

The captain flipped a hand at Steve, who understood. He and Shorty led Gandl into a room to help him into warm clothing.

"Back to your work, the rest of you," the captain ordered.

I went back to my drawing board but did no work. Out of the window I could see small blocks of ice passing us; or after the echoes of particularly violent cursing on the part of the Frabbel brothers I would see a sizable bit of iceberg float by, dangerously close. But we were safely through the narrows, and it might be expected that our normal routine of living would return.

I might mention that Captain French was irked by many details of his own job. So much so that he never missed a chance to turn work over to Steve Pound.

The first thing I heard, on awaking from a long night's sleep, was the captain's voice.

"Steve, I'm givin' you the responsibility of questioning Gandl."

"Gladly," said Steve.

"Find out all you can. Lady Lucille is upset bad. Couldn't eat her food last night. Swore she wouldn't sleep till she learned who that tiger woman was. She figures those furs were hers, and there ought to be a few hundred more like 'em."

"I'll see what I can learn."

A LITTLE later Steve Pound rapped at my door. I invited him in and closed the door after him. He began casually.

"Well, Jim, you saw?"

"Of course."

"And you're convinced?"

"I was never more mystified in my life. What does it mean, Steve?"

"I haven't had a talk with Gandl yet," said Steve. He lighted a pipe. "We won't get anywhere playing enemies with him. But he's well placed in Shorty's room. Shorty won't stand for it if anyone tries to harm him. He's a god to Shorty."

"And rightly so," I said, "considering how he can climb over ice, and considering that Shorty can't even walk through a door without bumping. Did the captain want to chain Gandl up?"

"I talked him out of it," said Steve. "I figure that if we give the fellow decent treatment he'll come through with the information we want. Don't you think so, Jim?"

"Maybe. He doesn't talk much. Somehow I have a feeling he may know

aplenty, if you could get him to unwind in his own language. Did you ever find out what nationality his name is?"

"It's a funny thing," said Steve. "He didn't know what to say when I asked him whether it was a first name or last name. His only name is Gandl, he said."

Steve gathered up a few of my pencils and some paper and told me to come along. We went back to Shorty's room, listened at the door, heard nothing. Steve knocked.

The door opened. Gandl was smiling. We walked in and closed the door behind us.

For an hour we talked, and I began to catch the drift of Steve's conversation. It was a subtle probe to find out how much Gandl knew of the arctic.

We were on the right trail. When it came to knowledge of seals, polar bears, the life of Eskimos, even the varieties of stunted trees and arctic vegetation, Gandl knew it all. Often he lacked the words to express his ideas, but our pencil sketches helped.

"How far do you want to go with us?" Steve finally asked.

Gandl, still smiling, answered, "As far north as you go."

Steve nodded. "I think it will be all right. Don't be frightened by the Captain or Lady Lucille. We want to be your friends, Gandl. Jim, here, is your friend. So is Shorty. And there's Professor Peterson—he's a square fellow. Let us know if you ever feel like talking with someone."

With that we went out.

DOWN the deck we met the captain, pacing back and forth in great agitation.

"Well, what did you find out? Did he open up?"

"Not much today," said Steve. "There'll be more later."

The captain snarled and muttered an oath.

"I told you to get those answers. Lady Lucille is threatenin' to have a nervous breakdown. She wants us to find out about her furs even if we have to torture that damned stowaway with hot irons."

"You'd never find out anything that way," said Steve. "You leave it to me. There'll be plenty of days before we reach our destination."

"What makes you so sure we've got any destination?" said the captain sarcastically. "Lady Lucille can change her plans overnight if she's a-mind to. We may be headed south tomorrow."

"We won't be," said Steve. His manner was sharp and I suddenly realized that he was playing a trump that he had held back. He pointed out to the vast line of snow-covered mountains. "There are too many valuable furs out there for us to turn back, Captain. You know Lord Lorruth's success as well as I. He didn't come up here prepared to spend three years for nothing."

"What do you mean?" said the captain.

"I mean that there are probably a few million dollars' worth of furs stored in some cache. Lady Lucille knows it. So do you. We're not a rescue party. What we've come after is those furs."

The captain's lips drew back tight and cold. His eyes would not meet Steve's or mine. He looked out across the land as if lost in thought. Finally he said, "If Lord Lorruth left furs, Lady Lucille deserves to have them."

"I agree with you completely," said Steve. "If Lady Lucille had just admitted it, instead of pretending, she might have saved herself some trouble."

"Are you thinkin' of that suicide?" the captain blurted.

"What made you think of that?" Steve asked.

"That damned stowaway has been talkin' too much," Captain French grumbled. "I found out that he could hear the talk from Lady Lucille's room from down in the hold."

"He hasn't said any more about it," Steve declared. "But I figure Inez Dorster was pretty badly disillusioned."

The captain shrugged off this matter as a minor irritation. He returned to the subject of furs.

"I'll talk with her right away," he said. "Maybe she'll see the sense of going on."

"I'm sure of it," said Steve. "What's more, she knows as well as the rest of us that we'll never find Lord Lorruth alive."

It was difficult to tell how the captain was going to take these challenging statements from his mate. He stomped up and down the deck a few times before he said anything more. Then he came back and offered his hand to Steve.

"Well," the captain said, "I'm glad we've got this straight. Now I can say a few things to you in confidence. They've been on my mind for quite a while, and now I can tell them to you."

"And to Jim, too?" Steve asked, to make sure I got in on it.

"Of course," the captain smiled bigheartedly. "I've confided with Jim from the first. He's harmless. But this particular secret—well, I haven't confided it to no one until now. Boys, I'm the happiest man on the whole wide ocean. I'm plannin' to marry Lady Lucille."

I responded with a half-choked, "Huh?"

"I figure it's the best thing for her," said the captain magnanimously, "seeing as how she's all cut up over realizing her husband must be gone for good. So one of these days when the ice closes in on us again we'll get out the weddin' bells."

CHAPTER VII

Slippery Slide

I'VE probably mentioned already that our geographer and "Professor," Cedric Peterson, was an earnest old student who carried the only supply of books on board. There was one dingy little volume bound in black and white stripes entitled, *The Great Maledictions of History.*

The little book had passed from one to another of us. Considerable controversy had grown out of it, and considerable fun.

Out of courtesy we turned our most interesting reading matter over to Lady Lorruth. She had kept this particular volume for several weeks.

Now a new whispered rumor made the rounds: Lady Lucille was getting a hunch that our expedition was under a curse.

I didn't know whether there was any foundation for this rumor. But I did know that Lady Lucille was afflicted by a few common superstitions; and now that a general state of bewilderment and confusion had seized all of us, it was natural that she should grasp at straws of magic and sorcery.

As a matter of fact, our very conditions of privation and isolation made it difficult for any of us to keep our balance.

We would overemphasize trifles. We would quarrel over slight privileges, and if the Frabbel brothers were in on it the quarrels would turn into fights. Enmities would flare up, sudden and intense.

Or on the other hand, friendships would become magnified—perhaps all out of proportion to their value.

At any rate, all of us were a little less confident of ourselves and our knowledge and our reasoning powers

after our shocking contact with the impossible—the girl and her tiger.

"Maybe Lady Lucille is right," some of the sailors would say. "Maybe there is a curse on this ship."

And so the ideas set forth in the little volume of "Great Maledictions" began to spread among us to be taken seriously and to do damage.

When discussions grew serious I discovered that many of the sailors believed there were such things as spiritual curses. All of us became exceptionally sensitive to every troublesome event that occurred.

"Have you noticed," Steve said to me one day, "that Lady Lucille has quit asking about the girl and the white tiger? At first she wanted to know whether Gandl knew anything. But now her mind is settled."

"What's her answer?"

"She's decided the girl and the tiger are impersonating an evil spirit."

"Why *evil?*" I asked.

"You know Lady Lucille as well as I do," said Steve. "That girl was terribly beautiful. What woman could help feeling an instinctive jealousy? But the important thing is that matter of lost furs. If they're not found, Lady Lucille's suspicions will conjure up curses for a long time to come."

"Did you ever see her letter from Lord Lorruth?" I asked.

"No. In fact, I think she destroyed it. But she claims there was a map describing his regular hunting circuit and locating the caches where he was storing the furs."

"We should do some exploring as soon as possible. If we could find one rich cache she might be willing to turn back. There's too much trouble gathering, Steve. It isn't healthy. If I'd known what she was like before I signed up—"

"Don't say it, Jim. Look at the bright side. As an artist, what was it worth to you to catch a glimpse of that tiger girl?"

THE very thought gave my spirits a lift.

"What I wouldn't give to see her again."

"You and I," said Steve, "are going to make an expedition to that shore. We're going to find that girl. If Gandl will go with us, all the better. Are you game, Jim?"

"What do you think we can accomplish?"

I think," said Steve, "that we can find out about Lord Lorruth—when he died, and where. The girl may even know where his body is. What's more, she may be able to lead us to the furs."

I shook my head. "That's a long shot in the dark, Steve."

"But it's worth a try. It's stupid of the captain and Lady Lucille not to make friends, if possible, and play their friendships to an advantage."

"People don't go out making friends with evil spirits."

"Great guns, I hope you're not swallowing all this curse talk. Heaven knows she's a mystery, but I'm damned if I'll doubt that she's a sure-enough living human being. I'd like to talk with her."

"Have you suggested this to the captain?"

"He hasn't been taking kindly to my suggestions," said Steve. "He hates me for my friendship with Gandl. That's why I'm ready to take a chance."

"When do we go?"

Steve looked at the sun lying low along the southern horizon.

"In a few days the winter darkness will be on us. How much warning will you need?"

"An hour."

The hour's warning came late in September. We struck out in the dory. Our ship had lain almost motionless for a week, but the winter's ice hadn't gathered in on us as yet.

A few of our crew had talked of excursions to the mainland to try their luck at hunting bear or seal. Steve had managed to rig up this party as a scouting trip preliminary to a series of bear hunts. On this pretext he limited the group to Gandl, himself, and me.

ON THE shore we crawled along the icy terrain with the aid of ice hooks and ropes until we reached the temporary safety on the top surface of a snow-covered glacier.

Steve had brought his pocket telescope and he kept peering off toward every mountain of ice expectantly.

"She's probably watching us this very minute," he said. "More than a dozen times during the past week I've caught sight of her off here in the distance."

"I can't understand why she should be following us."

Steve couldn't offer any satisfactory explanation. But I knew he had a theory that there was some mysterious connection between the girl and Gandl. That's why he had made it a point to bring Gandl along.

As for Gandl, he trudged along in his customary silence, but he frequently regarded his ragged clothing and seemed a bit uncomfortable over his appearance. That was a good sign.

"It's practically a proof," Steve whispered to me, as our mysterious third partner marched ahead, "that he expects to meet her."

A flurry of snow came sweeping down on us from the left. It was like a fantastic symbol of a coming blizzard. It flew past us at an almost unbelievable speed. It was the same breath-taking spectacle of fierce beauty—girl and tiger—riding like the wind.

In their wake a puff of icy air blasted against our cheeks. I stopped in my tracks, feeling that a stroke of paralysis had got me. Gandl, too, had halted. Only Steve had the presence of mind to beckon and call out a welcome.

"Hello-o-o-o!"

The girl raced her tiger to the top of the mountainous ridge before she stopped. Then she turned and looked down at us. Her beauty was full of boldness and ferocity and the appeal of youth. She laughed, and her rippling voice carried down to us like the most eerie, the most tantalizing music.

"Hello-o-o-o, up there!" Steve repeated. "Where are you going?"

"I'm not going any place. I live here," the girl retorted. "Where do you think you are going?"

There was a richness about her voice that seemed to fill the whole outdoors. It was a voice that rang with a high spirit that was at once merry and robust and daring; more than that, it contained a mysterious eternal quality —something I could not understand.

The girl had the advantage of us in every way. We tried to hurry toward her. But it was all that Steve and I could do to keep our balance and keep moving along this icy surface. It was hard for us to talk against the blasting winter gale. Our lips and cheeks were too nearly frozen.

As for Gandl, he had apparently decided to remain paralyzed.

But the girl was right in her element. Mounted on this remarkable beast, she could cavort about this treacherous landscape without the slightest thought of danger. She could ride into the icy winds like a phantom all the while laughing and shouting.

"Come on up," she cried.

STEVE and I both began looking around for a suitable path. Gandl came to our rescue, now, and led us up through the valley of ice and rocks, picking his step as cunningly as a mountain goat. We followed him.

Even so, we were likely to take half an hour to the task of ascending. This was much too slow for the girl. With an emphatic gesture she called to us.

"Never mind, I'll come down."

And down she came, bounding at a full gallop.

I'll never forget that sight, of the flying cloud of snow, the beautiful girl laughing, the snow-white tiger's ferocious face growing larger and larger and larger with every jump of the swift approach.

Suddenly my terror of the beast went to my throat. I probably cried out. I don't remember. I know that my blood went frozen.

Gandl shouted, "Flatten!" and he dropped to the ice.

But Steve and I each darted off in different directions. The next thing I knew I had lost my footing and was sliding down a long slippery pathway. I didn't know where it would end. I swerved and spun and kept on sliding.

"Where are you going?" the girl's voice called. I managed to catch a glimpse of her as she leaped off the beast. She had reached the point where a moment before the three of us had stood. Now there was only Gandl to greet her, and he was peering down at me, shouting at me to stop.

What had happened to Steve I could only wonder. He had fallen out of sight on the other side and I was still sliding.

The best I could do was to hurl myself clear of the rocks and sharp projections of ice, one after another. My long slide was a rapid-fire exercise in dodging death, for most of the time I was caroming helplessly.

At last I found myself stranded on a heap of glaciated boulders near the ocean's edge. I looked up. No longer could I see any of my original party. As my eyes took in the new scene, the only familiar sight was the brig lying two miles out at sea, and it was fast disappearing in a blanket of opaque mist.

I lay there, rubbing my arms and legs to make sure I was still all together, and pulled my torn ruffled clothes into shape. I felt pretty angry at myself for my clumsiness. I tried to feel angry toward the girl, too. But that emotion wouldn't work. Instead, the dominant emotion that surged through me was a maddening passion.

Instantly I was determined to clamber back to the top of the ridge. She would be up there. Steve and Gandl would be talking with her. And I—I would be out of the picture.

I tried to get up.

But with a painful groan I dropped back to my bed of ice for a moment's rest.

A few deep breaths—another moment or two of resting . . . How dark and thick that mist was growing . . . Surely I wasn't falling asleep . . . That would be unwise, just now . . . very unwise . . . but so very comfortable . . .

CHAPTER VIII

Instantaneous Igloo

I AWOKE to the sound of crunching footsteps.

A polar bear? No, a polar tiger. It came toward me out of the mist, its huge cat-face looming large, its yellow eyes gleaming.

Within fifteen feet of me the beast stopped.

Back of it was the foggy background of dark water. I was still lying where I had landed at the bottom of the slide.

I seized my revolver, made ready to shoot.

Then a voice spoke a low command.

"Don't pull the trigger. That's Whitey. He brought me down here to pick you up. Please don't shot him."

I turned to see the girl standing beside me. She bent down and helped me to my feet. Very much ashamed of my fear, I put my gun away.

"Come, Whitey," she called. "He's awake now. We'll take him back."

The beast's big shoulders moved gracefully as he ambled up beside me. The girl helped me on.

It was the strangest ride I ever had, borne along by the swift rhythmic trot of "Whitey." The light hold of the girl's arm around my waist was enough to keep me from slipping off the tiger's back. We ambled up one steep bank after another. In the smoky mist I lost all sense of direction.

My cold-numbed muscles began to feel a returning warmth; and this was puzzling, in view of the freezing temperature. *It was a mellow, restoring warmth that radiated from the body of the polar tiger.*

I bent to press my face against the animal's furry back, to test my discovery. Yes, there was an aura of electric warmth hovering about this beast.

So that was why this girl could survive in these frozen wastes, defying the deadly blizzards.

At last we were back upon the topmost ridge of rocks.

Imagine my delight when I heard voices and looked up to see Gandl and Steve Pound waiting for me.

"Here we are, safe at last, thanks to the young lady," said Steve Pound.

The young lady and Gandl were, at the moment, looking at each other with such serious intense expressions that I wondered if Steve and I weren't unnecessary.

But the girl turned to us and studied us through her merry, curious eyes.

"You men are quite brave to come exploring in this weather. Don't you know a blizzard is due?"

"We'd better get back to the ship," said Steve. "Will you come with us?"

"There wouldn't be time," said the girl. "The storm is about to break."

"We'll have to make camp," Gandl said in his low all-wise manner, and he led the way to a deep little valley wedged protectively within two jutting arms of mountain.

THIRTY minutes later we were gathered around a blazing campfire. I took in the picture hoping that sometime I could paint it. We were in the semi-darkness of the approaching arctic night. To our right the skies were red and blue with twistings, spiraling streaks—a gorgeous aurora borealis. We could hear the snapping and threshing of electrical activity. It was a scene rife with color from faraway to near at hand; for the crackling fire, too, was a rare mixture of colored flames. Incidentally, I must note that this fire was another proof of Gandl's ingenuity: he had somehow found an abundance of fuel hidden under the icy ledges.

The four of us, then, sat in comparative comfort—three men and this entrancingly beautiful creature out of the Viking story book. Back at a little distance was the white tiger curled up for a cat-nap, its eyes half-closed.

All in all, I thought, here was the most exotic picture that I had ever encountered. I must paint this. As long as I live I'll never see anything quite so colorful or romantic.

But there I was wrong. For although I did not know it at the time, this was

only my first approach to a new world —a world so completely exotic as to leave all reality in a limbo of the past.

The girl's rippling laughter dominated the mood of our camp fire visit. She seemed so very enthusiastic over meeting with strangers—and Steve and I were strangers. I was not so sure about Gandl.

When the girl told us that her name was Veeva, I couldn't help wondering whether she and Gandl might be members of the same racial stock.

Steve and I were eager to talk with her seriously. We bombarded her with dozens of questions. We wanted to know how she got here and where she lived, and how she had managed to follow along with our boat. Where had she gotten that superbly trained beast and how could she manage to find food for herself and it in all this wilderness of ice.

We had meant to get around to the subject of Lord Lorruth and his hidden furs. But our natural curiosity about Veeva crowded everything else out.

Do you think we got any satisfactory information from her? She liked to laugh too well. She had every advantage of us and she knew it? She told us only what pleased her.

"Food for Whitey?" she echoed. "Of course he has to be fed. Whitey is a ravenous eater . . . Carnivorous? Certainly."

"He eats fish, then?" Steve suggested.

"Only when he has to," said Veeva. "He much prefers human flesh."

I must have shuffled uneasily, for she quickly added, "But he's very well behaved. You three handsome gentlemen needn't have any fears."

Steve began to catch the spirit of her remarks and he winked at me.

"We'd better not let your tiger see Shorty Barnes. He's one of our plumpest crewmen."

"And we'd better look out for the captain," I said. "The captain would be good eating. He's better fed than anyone."

The girl laughed. "Just wait until you get shelved on top of the winter's ice. We'll be over, Whitey and I, and see if you don't have a few persons on board that you don't really need. Whitey will take care of them."

WE TURNED the subject abruptly. "Where did you get that name Veeva?"

"I can't remember that far back," said the girl.

"Is it a Norse name?" I asked.

She shook her head. "It comes from much further back than that—much, *much*. I really can't remember."

This was a strange statement, and I wanted to believe she was only joking. But again I caught that mysterious impression of something timeless and eternal. "Only a delusion," I thought, "accentuated by these deep gray mists, and the strange colored light of the fire."

"Gandl tells me that you're a queen," Steve said presently.

I pricked up my ears at this. It was news to me. Steve must have had some conversation with Gandl that I had missed—probably during the interval in which she had come to my rescue.

"I am a queen," Veeva answered simply, and she wasn't laughing.

"Queen!" I gasped, and instantly a blunt question escaped my lips. "Who is the king?"

She looked at me sharply. All at once the merriment was gone from her eyes and in its place was an expression of suppressed hurt. I stumbled to recover myself but probably made matters worse.

"That is—er—if there's a queen then there must be a king—and I just wondered—"

Steve came to my rescue. "What Jim means is, he's jealous because he's not the king. Isn't that it, Jim?"

"How'd you guess it?" I snapped, kicking awkwardly at a burning log. "You must be jealous yourself."

"Maybe I am," said Steve. "Who knows? Maybe I could have been a king if I'd been born in the right family."

"I can say that too," I retorted. "What does a king have that I don't have?"

"A kingdom, for one thing," the girl said.

"And for another," said Gandl, with a low bitter laugh, "a queen."

This talk had got under Steve's skin as much as mine. He rose impetuously.

"If I were a king," he said hotly, "I'd have the queen—don't worry."

I didn't like it, the way his eyes were burning down at Veeva, with her smiling up at him. I jumped up.

"If *I* were a king—"

But Gandl broke in with, "Maybe you men would like to fight for it." His withering sarcasm made both of us feel foolish. We settled down and stared into the fire.

But the whole conversation had evidently jarred upon Veeva's merry mood too deeply.

"Such talk!" she said. With an impetuous gesture to her pet tiger she sprang up. The tiger ran to her. She leaped to catch its mane, flung herself to its back and went racing away.

GANDL gave a low disappointed growl.

"Where is she going?" I asked.

Gandl shook his head. "You see, she *is* a queen. She doesn't care for roughhouse arguments."

"We acted like a pair of fools," Steve said. Then he bounded up and ran in the wake of the flyaway snow. He cupped his hand and shouted with all his powerful voice.

"VEEVA! Please! Forgive us! Come back, Veeva!"

I joined him, and the two of us kept calling. Our voices echoed back through the fog.

"VEE-EE-EEVA!"

Instantly it happened.

Perhaps no scientist has ever lived who has seen that peculiar combination of forces in action. To us it was a magical phenomenon. It happened as we shouted, and for an instant it swallowed up the very echo of our voices.

A sphere of ice formed over us.

It happened like a swift flash of light. At once it cut off the sight of the retreating girl. It blocked out the color of the aurora, thrust away the sight of the sky, the mountains, and every object that was more than forty feet away from us. It enclosed us completely—

"VEE-EE-EEVA!" Steve shouted, and this time his voice echoed round and round within the sphere of ice as if it were a solid stone cave.

CHAPTER IX

Frozen Waves

OUR voices softened to whispers. It was a ghastly weird enclosure that we were in and the curves of the ice over our heads flickered with the reflection of the colored firelight.

So perfect was this spherical temple that every breath of sound was magnified over and over. The crackle of fire was like the rapping of thunder traveling around and around until it melted away in the emptiness of the place.

"What caused it?" Steve asked. "Where did it come from?"

"It must have fallen," I suggested, "just like a big nutshell—"

"Over three nuts," Gandl said dryly. He seemed not the least disturbed.

But Steve's wild eyes were roving back and forth with unspeakable curiosity.

"There's an electric storm up in the sky," said Steve. "There must be electrical winds that have created this ice —somehow."

"How can an electric storm, or any other storm, make such a ceiling of ice," I argued. "It happened *instantly.* We know that much. And it couldn't have dropped down out of a cloud or it would have blown us off our feet. Besides, the whole structure would have smashed to smithereens."

My final word echoed with a weird "eeeennnnzzz," and faded to silence. Now we could hear the sleet and snow beating down upon our magic igloo.

"I think," said Steve, "that the girl must have clamped this icehouse on us. She's full of tricks. She might have drawn a wide net, and it caught the mist—"

I speculated upon this but it didn't seem possible. In fact, the whole happening was so devilishly mystifying that Steve and I were talking without rhyme or reason.

Then Gandl said, "The sound did it. I've seen it happen before."

"Sound? You mean thunder or something?"

"Not thunder. Your own voices calling 'VEE-EE-EEVA!' I've seen it happen before."

"Why, that's outlandish," I growled. "How could we bring on an ice roof just by calling 'VEE-EE—'?"

"Stop it!" Steve warned. "If you bring on another one we might be buried in tons of ice. How thick is that ice, anyhow? Where do we get out?"

We broke through the lower edge of the five- or six-inch crust of ice. For the next hour we trudged around through the swirling sleet and snow, examining this strange icy temple, trying to understand its form.

It was as big as a small church. It had materialized around us like something out of a void. It had imprisoned us just in time to let that beautiful girl who called herself a queen, ride away from us, heedless of our calls.

The small valley in which this spherical prison was located was shaped like an A. And now we noticed that the sphere had locked itself over each of the side arms of this triangular formation. Here was a strange thing. There was no bulge beyond the outer circumference of the sphere at any point. But we remembered that on the inside there had been several small bulges. We returned inside to examine them by the waning firelight.

THE accumulating warmth was causing little rivers of melting ice to creep outward from the zenith, like ribs of a liquid fan, spreading into a huge crystal star-fish of icicles. Soon this place would become dangerous with falling ice. But we must examine those bulges. Gandl followed us.

Mid-point along the icy ledges which I have called the arms of the A, the curved surfaces of the sphere became a clutter of smaller ball-like formations —convex scallops within the perfect curve of the circumference.

We asked Gandl if he could explain the meaning of all this.

"Sound caused it," he said. "The sound froze."

It was a vague answer, but I began to see some logic in it. We should have had Professor Peterson with us. He might have carried the explanation

much further.

"What do you make of it?" Steve Pound asked me.

"It's a good subject for a painting," I replied. "One of the most interesting studies in form I've ever seen. Look at the zig-zag designs running through the ice wherever you break into a cross-section."

Steve was very much annoyed. He continued to mutter that he was not a believer in magic. But he couldn't argue this thing out of existence. For that purpose our little campfire was much more effective. Suddenly there was a cracking and roaring of ice.

I caught glimpses of the glittery fall. Tons of the stuff was crashing downward. Big seams ripped wide and the shrill whistle of the winds blasted our ears.

We rushed out in rough-and-tumble formation, falling and rolling in the snow. By some miracle we escaped the final huge concussion that brought our temple down in a mass of frozen wreckage.

Those irregular blocks of ice were still our friends, however, if we could work fast enough. The blizzard was howling with the promise of freezing us to death. If we could pile the ice blocks together fast enough we might devise a cone-shaped shelter and protect ourselves until there was a chance to get back to the ship. Already Gandl had leaped into the debris of ice to save the fire.

Steve and I worked like snowy demons.

Right around the fire the shelter took form.

A cowardly hope crowded at my mind. If Veeva would only come back and rescue us—or even give us another instantaneous igloo—if it was in her power to do so.

But Steve was much less selfish.

"I hope *she's* not out in this awful storm," he said.

AT length we were again enclosed—this time in a tiny little structure that jabbed our backs and elbows with sharp points of ice. We baked our faces and froze our rears and got our eyes filled with blue smoke. But for the present we were sheltered. I steered our talk back to the instantaneous igloo.

"Did you ever," I asked, "see diagrams of the form which sound waves take?"

I got my sketch book and drew a few simple illustrations.

"Here," I said, "is an electric bell. Where must you stand to hear it when it rings?"

"Where?" said Steve. "Why anywhere, of course, as long as I'm not too far away."

"The sound waves go out from the point of vibration in a sphere, don't they?"

"I suppose so."

"You know they do. You know that if a train whistles and you've placed a man ten rods north of it, and another ten rods south, another ten east, and another ten west—all four men will hear it at the same time. The same would be true if you were up in the air ten rods above it. That means that every sound vibration tends to spread in the shape of a ball that keeps spreading wider and wider. Now, do you see what might have happened here?"

I pointed to my illustrations which represented a number of concentric waves growing from the source of the sound.

"If these waves should be caught at a certain point and frozen into something rigid, we would get the exact shape of a sphere."

"How could such a thing happen?"

"I don't know. I only know that the whole structure we had here proves it did happen. Even those smaller inward bulges fit into the same scheme perfectly. Obviously the few waves that struck the banks of ice were bulging back on the rebound—*echoes,* you understand—when the freeze caught them."

Steve nodded. We both looked toward Gandl who shrugged.

"That's better than I could tell it," said Steve, "and don't ask me to explain it when we get back to the ship. Somehow I'd rather we'd just say nothing about it." Then he frowned. "But if it happened once, what's to keep it from happening again?"

"It can," said Gandl. "Whenever the mist is thick it can happen."

"What bothers me is whether Veeva might get trapped too," said Steve.

Gandl replied with a blunt, "No."

More than ever, then, I wondered if the girl had some peculiar power over the sphere of ice. "I think she did it to trap us. We displeased her."

Again we looked at Gandl for any expression which might confirm or reject this new theory.

"You men are my friends," said Gandl. "I must tell you that there are many dangers in this land. You do not know them but I—I have been here before, and Veeva has been here longer than I. She knows all the dangers."

All of us slept. When we awoke, the fire was gone, and the snow was so thick around us that we had to climb the outer walls of our shelter to get up on the surface.

CHAPTER X

Invisible Terror

WITHOUT Gandl's help we might have perished.

It was a grueling job, getting back to shore through the deep snow. The treacherous pitfalls were hidden and there were no trails to follow.

But there were landmarks of a sort. We neared the shoreline.

There were three igloos.

Where nothing had been before except the jagged icy banks of a narrow inlet, three spherical snow-covered houses showed white against the black waters.

As we approached the nearest of these we made out the figure of Cedric Peterson.

"The Professor!" I gasped. "What's he doing here?"

"Looking for us, most likely," said Steve, and he called, "*Helloooo—*"

"Sssh!" I gasped. "You'll bring on another one of those things—"

"What things—Oh, you mean—"

"The ice prison, of course. Don't you remember, it was when we were shouting that the thing suddenly came over us."

By that time the Professor was motioning us to be silent. When we got closer he began whispering and pointing to the igloos.

"I dug my way out," he said. "But it was a tough job. I froze six fingers. That spherical wall is all of three feet thick."

The Professor was in bad shape from too much cold. He showed us the mittens he'd worn the ends out of, fighting at the ice.

"I went round and round in the blackness," he said, "before I realized what I was up against."

"How'd it happen?" Steve asked. "Were you yelling at the time?"

"Exactly," said the Professor. "That's what did it. The air is so saturated with moisture that the sound waves crystallized, and there I was, captured by my own voice."

"There are many dangers here," Gandl said dryly.

"We'd better not do any more shouting," Steve warned, holding his voice down to a whisper. Then with a hint of anxiety he said, "Who were you shouting at? Did you see her—the queen?"

"I *thought* I saw her pet tiger," said the Professor. "But on closer inspection I determined that it was a polar bear. And it was at that moment, precisely, that my voice began to function."

Our eyes turned to the other two igloos.

"Was someone with you?"

"The captain and Shorty," said the Professor. "I assume that they are in those two remaining mounds of ice, either frozen to death or slowly going mad like caged animals."

"Come on," said Gandl.

We found a ledge that the snowdrifts had left bare, and it furnished enough stones to serve as tools in our half-frozen hands.

WE BROKE through the second igloo and were rewarded by finding Shorty Barnes, very much alive. In fact, there was the liveliest light in his bulging eyes that I had ever seen.

"They've been chasing me," he whispered in a weird manner. "They've been chasing me all over the place. It was a nightmare."

"Exactly," said the Professor. "A nightmare that would drive any man insane if it went on for long. It's against man's nature to be trapped in the dark."

"Who did it?" Shorty gasped. "Who was that monster?"

"Take it easy, Shorty," said the Professor. "You'll get over those bad dreams before long. Come on, we've got to get Captain French."

We hurried on to the last igloo, and tried to pay no attention to Shorty's erratic mumblings about his delusions of monsters creeping after him in the dark.

As we broke through the two-foot wall of the third igloo, we were greeted by a very unhappy growl.

"The captain!" Shorty said with a sigh. "Come on out, Captain."

Out came a big polar bear. It charged off across the snow.

"Gee, golly," Shorty gasped. He had been on the verge of entering the place. Now he keeled over and fainted.

The polar bear almost got away from us. But Steve had the presence of mind to get a revolver into action. He fired three times, and in the thick twilight we could see the big animal stumble into the snow.

Steve and Gandl made for the beast, and another bullet finished it. Hideous fears were on us now. What had happened to the captain? Had he been caged in with the bear?

We examined the fresh blood that was already freezing around the bear's mouth.

"It could be from the bullet," said Steve, not too confidently. "But if it is, what in the name of heaven happened to Captain French?"

Our balloon of terror was punctured by an angry cry from the second igloo.

"Come here, you damned no-good sailors. What is this, desertion? Or mutiny?"

We raced back to the ice mound from which we had rescued Shorty a few minutes before. Captain French was emerging from it, using the most vigorous language.

We approached him with a chorus of "Sssssh!"

He wasn't a man to be easily quieted, and he was all pent up with rage. He had been neglected and deserted. He thought he had fallen into some curious

crevasse, and no one had come to his rescue, and he'd been going round and round trying to keep out of reach of some monstrous animal that he couldn't see in the blackness.

"I didn't dare yell," he whispered hoarsely. "But I didn't lose my head. I puffed and snorted like a mad animal, and I bluffed it out, whatever it was. I think it was a bear."

"It was me," said Shorty.

The captain gave a sullen bark, then, that would have bluffed out any beast in the arctic, and he commanded that this incident was closed, once and for all and we were never to mention it again.

That brusque comand might have stuck, but for one little comment from the Professor which bore deep into the minds of all of us and began twisting and spinning like an icy diamond drill.

"Are we to forget," the Professor said dryly, "that our voices may freeze over us at any moment? There's death in these instantaneous igloos. We've all been lucky to get off this easy."

The captain's gruff rejoinder was not very satisfactory.

"Get a hitch on that bear and let's get back to the ship. As far as Lady Lorruth is to know, we've not been in any special danger. We've all been out on a hunt—"

The captain noticed the faint smile on Gandl's lips, and added hastily.

"I mean a bear hunt."

CHAPTER XI

Terror Over the Ship

"Ssssh . . . Sssssh . . . Sssssh." That was the watchword on board the brig during the days that followed.

It was a double-edge hush. Loud talk was dangerous. Unguarded talk could be embarrassing.

For a few days the frightful menace of voices turning to ice was kept secret.

But keeping secrets on a small brig is no easy matter. Our community of wagging tongues and eager ears was too crowded. Every sailor was curious to know whether any of us had seen Veeva. They poopooed the idea that we had simply gone on a bear hunt, even though we now had a handsome fur to show for it.

"What, no tigers?" they would say. And the Frabbel brothers added that if *they* had gone hunting they'd have come back with a tiger rug and live prisoner weighed down with gold ornaments.

"No more time for bear hunting," Captain French would argue defensively, when the Frabbel brothers began annoying him with their agitations.

"There ought to be a calm before long," Rake Frabbel retorted. "That'll be our chance."

"If any of you damned fly-by-nights go ashore we'll run off and let you freeze to death," the captain said.

"Come on, out with it, Captain," said young Frabbel. And the second brother, Reuben—the one with cheek-whiskers that reached up to the bags under his eyes—joined the hecklers and climbed on the band wagon with an offer to bet a hundred dollars that the captain had already paid his respects to that "damned fetching ice lady."

"You want to bet?" the captain snarled.

"Only I ain't got a hundred dollars," said Reuben Frabbel with a taunting grin.

Meanwhile Lady Lucille was being as suspicious as a caged cat about twenty-four hours a day. And there the captain was finding himself in hot water aplenty.

"You'd be surprised," Professor

Peterson confided to me, "how the old boy has been arguing with Lady Lorruth. He insists we shouldn't try to go on searching for her husband, unless we first pick up every scrap of information from those we pass."

Our conversation broke off shortly. *The girl was coming across the horizon, riding like the wind.*

PROFESSOR PETERSON and I, standing on the starboard deck, were the first to see her—we thought. The shore was a quarter of a mile away, and there was a light mist; but we couldn't mistake the figures with the whirlwind of flying snow following in their wake.

"Look!" the Professor gulped. I cupped my hands to my mouth as if to *shout* to her. "Don't," he snapped. "Wait. Don't make a sound."

Girl and tiger galloped on across the white land, paralleling our course, making at least twice our speed. She made no effort to hail us. Rather, it appeared, she merely intended to keep abreast our progress.

Captain caught sight of her, and you could see the shudder that passed over him. He was bending over the rail at the prow, and had been supervising a job of mending an ugly ice gouge in the hull. Below him were the three Frabbel brothers in the dory, bouncing along beside the ship. The captain had given them this repair job to shut them up, I think. Certainly not because they were carpenters. And not because it was agreeable weather for such work. It was thirty-nine degrees below zero.

Young Frabbel noticed that the captain was looking off in the distance intently, and the husky young sailor turned.

He must have seen the girl just before she disappeared. The hammer slipped from his hand and splashed into the sea. And young Frabbel suddenly yelled—a shrieking note calculated to wake the high heavens.

He must have yelled again. I *saw* him yell. *But I didn't hear.*

In the split second after his lips parted, it happened.

A huge spherical chunk of ice appeared against the side of the hull. It was like an immense white balloon bulging out through the ship. Less than a third of it was visible.

Then it turned and slushed into the water—a rounded chunk of ice with a sheer side that edged up out of the water. The overturned dory was caught within, and its keel could barely be seen through the dark green water.

The three Frabbels were somewhere inside that broken ball of ice. The object began to drift away from the ship, through the waves of green-black paint.

We worked fast. The captain's orders were sometimes helpful, more often superfluous. It was a job that challenged every man who could throw a hook.

Presently the chunk of ice was spinning back toward us, and we could see that Reuben Frabbel was coming out of the trap alive. His arms were waving, but his legs were fast between the dory and the ice.

Gandl and Steve and four others braved the icy water. When they came back, many minutes later, with the aid of our ropes, they had done all that any men could have done . . .

Again the dory hung in its place on the foredeck.

And again, after three or four days, the voices of the Frabbel brothers were added to the noise of those rooms astern where cursing and obscene talk flourished.

But now there were two Frabbel brothers, not three. Rake, the oldest, had been buried at sea . . .

Lady Lucille rang the assembly bell

and in her most vitriolic manner she gave us a dressing down.

"From now on," she said, "this ship is going to be under the sternest of discipline."

Then and there she authorized the captain to apply severe punishment—chains or worse—for any offenders.

I WENT away from this session with mingled awe and amusement. It was marvelous to see how uncertain of ourselves and of the expedition every man of us had become. Peril hovered around us. The sounds of clattering dishes, of slamming doors, of ringing bells—any noise whatsoever was taken as ominous.

This fear was a growing thing—like the fear that multiplies in a mob. And, strange to say, the new stillness was as much a reminder of the terror as any noise.

Shorty was the one who did the most talking about these strange ice traps.

"They might hit us any time," he would whisper. "They come just like that out of thin air."

He snapped his fingers.

"And do you know what would happen? The whole ship would be covered by a great big ball of ice—tons of it—and over we'd go."

His eyes would almost bug out of their sockets. In a picture it would have been funny. But I wasn't in the mood to draw any caricatures.

All of this talk was maddening to Lady Lucille Lorruth.

To add to her visions of hideous disaster Steve Pound and Gandl made another short excursion over to the island coast. They returned with stories that reinforced Shorty's calamity howling. They had sighted a dozen or more various-sized ice mounds that dotted one side of a deep V-shaped valley.

These wild terrors crystallized into a strict silence. Lady Lorruth had me make dozens of signs to post around on all corners of the ship.

"Make no noise." "Do not speak above a whisper."

CHAPTER XII

Whisperings of Romance

THERE was a humorous side to all this whispering.

Terror is one thing; attraction for a beautiful girl is quite another. The sailors chose to believe that these ice-traps were a phenomenon of fogs and mists, and that this mysterious creature named Veeva had nothing to do with them.

And so, while we were stalled again by a dead calm, the boys began to cast longing eyes toward the shore.

The girl must be following us for some reason. Perhaps she had a favorite on board. One after another the seamen began to spruce up. Young Frabbel began shaving and sometimes went so far as to wash his face.

Looking back upon this now, I must admit that I was developing my own delusion the same as the others. I began telling myself that I might be the lucky man who would gain this girl's favor. Hadn't she rescued me with her own hands?

I had always supposed I would marry some day. It was just one of those things I had never got around to. At any rate I began planning and wondering and scheming. This girl was too beautiful to be left living in this arctic wilderness.

How interesting it would be to her to come back to New York!

What a thrill she would get out of the skyscrapers, the noise of the city, the gay bright lights. This was my dream and the more I thought of it

the brighter it grew. Mrs. Jim McClurg would be a valuable partner to an artist like me; she'd become the most popular young lady in all the town. And how she would enjoy it. Undoubtedly she would be grateful all her life if I rescued her from the monotony of this icy world.

But in this dream I always came to a dead stop when I remembered that *she was a queen.*

Queen of what?

Was she really a person of royal blood? Did she maintain responsibilities toward some little kingdom of Greenland natives?

I must see her again soon.

My dreams were coming along nicely when I began to notice strange traits among my fellow men. Why all this whispered clamor over shaving soap and razors? Why so much attention to the detail of combing our hair?

Why such a demand for pocket telescopes to spend idle hours gazing at the shore line to our right? Malonski, the steward, had to parcel out such things on a sharing basis.

Now and then our vigilance was rewarded—we would catch glimpses of the girl riding along over the icy hills; as Reuben Frabbel put it, "Within rifle range, only who gives a damn about a white tiger?"

Reuben gave a damn about something, judging by the fact that he'd clipped the whiskers off the upper half of his black face.

Those rare glimpses were what gave zest to the long hours of the dark winter, now on us.

BY THIS time we had all come to look to Gandl for authoritative information. Would this girl continue to follow us? Was she really a queen? Were there villages to supply her with food and shelter? Did she know this whole terrain?

Gandl's silence was interpreted as yes or no, according to the answers we preferred.

Gandl was living in Shorty's room now, and Shorty would come to me to complain.

"They're overworking Gandl," he said. "One man after another comes to him to ask confidential questions. And they all ask the same thing. Is she already married? And if she is, where's her husband? What's he the king of? Is he a good fighter? Does he have firearms?"

Even the captain, Shorty said, would make these inquiries. But about all anyone got out of Gandl was that she was a queen.

"Steve will tell you so himself," said Gandl. "He heard her say it too. If she says she is a queen, she must be."

And so, out of these indefinite encouragements, our delusions of hope multiplied.

Shorty came to me to try out his talents as an actor. "I used to ride horses," he said. "I been thinkin'—when we get back I could go on the stage with a trick riding act. Don't you think so, Jim?"

Of course I heaped compliments on him and told him, "By all means you should be on the stage. With those bowlegs of yours you could ride a trick mule, at least. But what you really need, Shorty, is a beautiful lady that could ride a tiger."

Shorty's eyes fairly popped and he broke into a comical confession.

"I been thinkin' over that angle too, Jim," he said. "Maybe I've got a fortune waitin' for me when I git back. And that girl—well, I got her smilin' my way already. But don't tell no one."

He snapped his fingers at an imaginary horse, gave a frog-like jump as if

leaping astride, and pranced off on his bandy legs with an air of a clown rider.

In contrast there was Steve Pound.

Yes, Steve was smitten right along with the rest of us and he would come in for the most serious talks.

In fact he would make me feel guilty over being in love with the same girl. He was so earnest about it all.

"Jim," he would say, "I've led a lonely life. The time's come when I'll stop these ocean voyages and settle down in some little rustic cottage by the sea. I've seen a lot of girls in my day but it takes a really beautiful person to bring a man like me to such a decision. I guess you can appreciate what's on my mind."

"Yes, I think I understand."

"Can you imagine what that girl would be like after you had led her to the altar?"

"I've wondered about it," I admitted.

"Chances are," said Steve, "she wouldn't be half so flighty as she seems. I've read a poem somewhere about the quiet little woman who loved her home and all—"

Believe it or not, Steve actually tried to quote some poetry to me and his eyes got a very faraway look.

All and all we were the most uncertain lot of sailors you ever saw. We were dominated by these two conflicting emotions—fear and hope.

IN OUR general discussions the dominating note would be dangers that we all knew could strike upon us at any time—the certainty that our ship could be capped with a sphere of ice and instantly overturned and sunk. And in contrast were these individual hopes, half spoken, half secret, growing in the breast of each man—the hope that he might be the girl's favorite.

The arctic winter came on us in earnest now. We came to a dead stop. All our prying and tugging at hooks and bars and anchors was to no avail. The shelf ice slipped down against us from the north. It crowded in under the bow of the ship and upended us. It crashed against the sides of the hull. Foot by foot we were elevated until we sat, high and dry, upon the thick, solid floor.

We were one with the distant land. We saw that we could walk toward the mountains, north, east, or south, without ever having to cross any waters. The waters were gone. Continents and islands were joined in one endless plain of ice.

You may have read of arctic expeditions in which such an imprisonment has brought on months of despair. Such was not the case with us. On the contrary. And the reason was Veeva. Everyone interested in her was secretly or openly elated over the plight of our ship. The ocean barrier between us and this glorious Viking beauty had been removed.

Days without apparent dangers had made for lax enforcement of the whispering rule. And now the captain yielded to pressure and sanctioned a few brief hunting expeditions.

Hunting suddenly became the popular sport—we called it polar bear hunting or seal hunting. Or, in the case of the captain, it was a scouting expedition to look for reindeers. But the important news from these expeditions became a matter of open interest—had anyone seen Veeva?

But once Steve Pound went hunting alone *and didn't come back.*

A terrific blizzard set in and hung on for five days, and no rescue party dared go out more than three-quarters of a mile from the ship. The thermometer dropped to forty-seven below, and three sailors who had started off on the rescue

mission were dragged home half dead.

When the storm's fury was over, we made further efforts to comb the base of the mountain for signs of a lost man.

Finally we knew we were beaten. And still we waited, hour after hour, always expecting—

But Steve Pound did not return.

CHAPTER XIII

The Lady Borrows a Knife

MY WORK kept me on board ship. Lady Lucille was becoming more demanding. I had to work outside in some of that bitter weather. I could sketch for only a few minutes at a time.

Sometimes there was moonlight to highlight the contours of the icy mountains. Sometimes there were glorious northern lights and crackling electric storms that crept close to the surface. These were the features of the arctic night which Lady Lorruth wanted me to capture in my paintings.

In her commands to all of us she was becoming exceedingly caustic and bitter. Her nerves were overwrought. Her eyes were forever shifting. She had lost the confidence of the crew long ago. Worse, she was losing that of Captain French.

She knew, too, that the men were talking about her.

"What are they saying?" she would ask me.

"How do I know, when they speak in whispers?" I would reply.

"They wonder why I've come up here, don't they? They doubt my—my ideals."

"I hope they have no reason to do that," I said. "But you're the only one who knows."

Her lips would tighten and she would seem to be on the verge of a tantrum. But she would snatch for straws of comforting confidence, she often would plead with me.

"I'm going to make you a gift, Jim," she said. "I'll give you a valuable fur —one of the finest. But you must lie to the sailors for me. Tell them I'm pining for the love of my husband. Tell them I still have faith that he isn't lost. Make them believe it, Jim. Don't let them think I've only come to—to claim his treasures . . . But they're mine—mine, Jim! Do you hear?"

"Of course they're yours, Lady Lorruth—"

"Say it again, Jim. Say it again. Don't look at me in that accusing way."

It was pitiful to listen to her. This matter was burning into her soul. The more she talked the more she revealed that she was sure her husband was dead and that she was glad of it. Of course, I could say nothing to the crew for everyone knew by this time that one of her two highest hopes was to find the wealth of furs. And a perfectly natural and rightful want it was—except for the fact that she was glad her husband was dead.

Her other goal was to marry into Captain French's fortune.

This truth became apparent to all of us.

But an awful fear was obstructing her plan. Her second goal was growing more remote. *Captain French was losing interest in her.*

Upon one pretext or another the captain had discontinued those comradely walks around the deck with her. And now the spark of truth was igniting her proud fury. The captain, along with the common deck hands, had become enamored of the Queen of the Ice.

This left to Lady Lorruth her first hope only. From day to day I could sense the intensifying of her passion to find the lost furs.

SHE would say to me, "I know Lord Lorruth has left them. We will find them. You can imagine how my people back in England will treat me when I return. I may be the wealthiest woman in the British Isles."

"That will be wonderful," I said to try to match her enthusiasm.

"And then Captain French will be very envious, won't he?"

"I—I suppose so."

"I'm sure he will. Men like Captain French aren't easily swerved by trifles, are they?"

"Why, no—er—you know Captain French's stout-hearted character as well as I."

I was groping for these comments. Her arguments bore down upon me so insistently that I felt compelled to agree with her. When I dared controvert her observations she would fly into a rage and stalk into her room, slamming the door behind her.

Whether I should have pampered her or not I do not know.

"Yes, Captain French will see me in a very different light," she smiled, with evil satisfaction. "He will be choked with jealousy, and then he will come to me and remind me of our old friendship. And do you think I will marry him then?"

This one I could not possibly answer. But she had her own answer.

"Not unless he comes to me on his knees. Not unless he apologizes for every moment of neglect. These are painful hours that I am enduring, Jim. For every hour of his infidelity through this winter night I will demand a hundred hours of apology when he comes to me on his knees."

These fancies gave her a glow of sadistic delight.

Something Steve Pound had said to me kept humming through my brain. "Lady Lucille is going crazy." That is what Steve Pound had thought.

I watched her intently as she stood there twisting a corner of paper on my drawing board into shreds.

"He'll crawl, he'll crawl. He'll crawl on his hands and look up to me with eyes as jealous as green fire. He'll sing his apologies in every key."

"And then?"

"And then—ah!"

"You'll—you'll marry him?"

"Perhaps," she said, "if it suits my pleasure. Or I may—yes, I may stab him through the heart."

Her eyes were fixed upon a small putty knife which I used for cleaning dried paint off the palette. The object fascinated her and her nervous fingers began to play upon the handle.

"Do you need this?" she said with a sudden change to a matter-of-fact mood.

"Frequently, yes."

"I'd like to borrow it," she said brightly. "My window keeps frosting over, and a case knife's no good."

"Very well."

It was Professor Peterson who called my attention that evening to the fact that Lady Lorruth was sharpening this little putty knife on a soapstone.

"More idiosyncrasies," I muttered.

"She'll bear watching," he said.

WITHIN twenty-four hours everyone was talking about her strange conduct. Professor Peterson thought I had better go to her and ask for my property. I was glad to obey. She met me at the door of her cabin and instantly I found myself on the defensive. Her manner was imperious.

"Tell Captain French to call an assembly," she said.

Again I obeyed. We assembled on the east deck, which was partially roofed over by shelf ice that had crowded over the bulwarks and settled.

There was considerable tension as we lined up. Shorty was perspiring in spite of the sub-zero temperature.

Lady Lucille Lorruth stated her demands with the minimum of words.

"I want my furs. I want every fur that Lord Lorruth had left for me. Somewhere there is a cache. You should have found it before this. I'm feeding you and paying you. There's no more time to waste. I want you to go and get my furs."

Captain French broke in with a blustering protest.

"How can we? We're still fifteen miles from the place you said we'd find another cache."

"So what do you intend to do?"

Captain French stammered. "We'll wait till the ice breaks away, of course, and finish our voyage."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. You'll set out on foot. Equip yourselves as necessary."

"Fifteen miles in this temperature?"

"Those are my words. I can't endure this agony of waiting. I'm the wealthiest woman in England and I won't be cheated of another day of waiting for my riches."

"I'm telling you, Lady Lucille," the captain's face was white. "We're not working this right. If we want to find out what happened, we've got to contact these people."

He made an indefinite gesture toward the eastern mountains.

"*These* people? *What* people?"

"You know—there are people out there somewhere. We've seen—"

"We've seen *one,*" said Lady Lucille bitterly. "That awful female. But she's not a person. She's a phantasm—an evil spirit—a curse!"

A curse! The word struck home. It caught us off guard.

"*You* know I'm right, Cedric Peterson," she stormed. "You've read that book on the workings of maledictions!"

Professor Peterson faltered, "Yes, but I—"

Lady Lucille followed her advantage. "And you, Malonski, you'll bear me out that these curses still work today."

"Well, that one time I told you about —" Malonski began timidly.

"They *do* work. This female spirit is following us, haunting us. I forbid any of you to see her again."

Captain French's dark face trembled but he began muttering, and the next thing the two of them were arguing. Captain French insisted that the one sensible thing to do was to find the Ice Queen and have her tell what she knew of Lord Lorruth.

The meeting ended in a furious deadlock. It looked like Lady Lorruth and the captain had come to the ultimate clash. Lady Lucille hurled deadly threats. She was fairly screaming. We were awed, not so much by her threats as by her insane manner. Her language was as profane as any drunken sailor's.

"I'll cut the heart out of the first man who dares to speak with that diabolical siren. I don't care which one of you it is. I tell you that woman has placed a curse upon my husband and upon us. Give heed to my words. It will be *death* for any one of you who *speaks* to her—even you, Jim McClurg, or you, Cedric Peterson, or you—you—you—"

She was screaming at the top of her voice. With trembling fingers she was pointing at Captain French.

In that sickening moment, as he was backing away from her and we were all cringing at this terrible exhibition of madness, a flurry of sleet and snow to the east of our ship caught our attention.

We turned and stared through our barricade of ice. *Veeva the Queen was riding toward us.*

CHAPTER XIV

A Party for Nobility

IT WAS the strangest meeting that I've ever witnessed. The tiger stopped with his forepaws on the ship's rail. Veeva the beautiful was before us, her eyes flashing boldness, her lips laughing. She was sitting side-saddle, and her bare legs were brown against the tiger's coat of snowy white.

"Hello," Veeva greeted.

None of us could speak without disobeying Lucille's commands. But I smiled and nodded, and I noticed that several others did the same.

I expected Lady Lucille to burst into a fit of violence. Her hysteria was beyond the point of recovery. She was ready to fly into a torrent of irrational screaming.

No, she was past words. Instead, she drew from the inside pocket of her coat the little putty knife. It glittered like a new gem. It flashed up in her hands and she started forward.

Icy terror ran through my spine. Matching Veeva's fierce beauty were her dazzling metal accoutrements. She wore on her side an ornamental sword and this she seized without an instant's hesitation.

At the same time she emitted one of her boisterous laughs, gurgling and irrepressible. It proved that this whole terrifying situation was no threat to make her heart quail. To her it was simply a ridiculous bluff.

"Come on, Lady, let's play that we're having a duel," Veeva shouted with glee.

Then her rippling laughter ran up and down the scales. She slapped the tiger on the throat and it bounded down off the ship and out to a little plaza of ice. Veeva leaped nimbly to her feet.

"Come on," she cried again. "We'll let my tiger be the referee."

The big pet gave a fierce growl.

Poor Lady Lorruth! Her upraised arm went stiff. She was mad enough to kill. But her helplessness was obvious. She turned and stomped into her cabin. The door went closed with a solid bang.

Would the captain dare to speak to Veeva?

Professor Peterson and I were the ones who chanced a violation of Lady Lucille's stout restriction.

"Where's Steve Pound?" I asked. "Have you seen him anywhere?"

"You could help us, Veeva," the professor said. "You could tell us what we need to know. You saw that terrible demonstration. The woman is going mad. But if you could show us the way we might save her."

"What do you want?" Veeva asked.

"We want news of Lord Lorruth and his fur trading expedition. They came here five years ago. They were supposed to have reached a point fifty miles north of here. We're sure that they came this far. We found a letter. We believe there's a treasure cache—"

The captain interrupted with a challenging bark.

"And we want to know where you got those furs you are wearing."

PROFESSOR PETERSON tried to soften the tone of the conversation.

"Your furs are your own business, of course. You needn't answer personal questions unless you wish. But about Lord Lorruth—"

"And Steve Pound," I put in.

The girl gave one of her amused laughs. "I needn't answer any questions."

Professor Peterson turned to the captain. "This lady is a queen. She deserves the finest hospitality that we can offer. Why do we allow her to stand

out there on the ice? Can't we persuade her to come and eat at our table? Isn't it time for a party? We could serve a double ration of grog."

The captain stammered and stumbled. The suggestion embarrassed him. His authority was being slowly consumed between two fires—the madness of Lady Lucille, and the cool rationality of Professor Peterson.

But the suggestion of an extra drink struck the captain at his weakest point.

The girl came aboard.

The tiger waited at a safe distance.

We sat together at the table. Though it was a meager feast, the spirit was convivial, for we had no trouble persuading the captain that the occasion merited an extra measure of drink all around.

But the joviality was strained. Steve Pound was no longer with us. He had been one of Veeva's foremost friends and champions. Now she cunningly evaded every question that any of us tried to ask about him.

And there were more immediate reasons for the nerve-strain that attended our party. I kept an eye on the dining room door fearing that Lady Lorruth might enter at any moment. Perhaps she had swooned in a fit of insanity. If so, this meeting might succeed in forming the confidence we needed.

But the captain was over-eager, and Gandl sat moodily silent. As often as Professor Peterson and I would be ready to pop an important question, something would be sure to break down the rapport we had established.

Finally Professor Peterson went out, dragging Shorty along with him. A little later Shorty came back and told me the professor wanted to see me.

Out of hearing of the others, Professor Peterson said, "We'll call each of the men out one at a time. They've got to understand our tactics. Veeva *is* a queen. She may be the queen of some insignificant village of twenty-five natives, or she may be the ruling power over some world-wide secret society. You never can tell. At any rate, we've got to mobilize our efforts to bolster this reception. She's a person of majesty. In her own eyes she may be far more important than Lady Lucille Lorruth. We'll treat her accordingly."

I said, "It sounds like insubordination."

"It is," said the professor, "but it is good sense."

AND so one after the other of us came back from Professor Peterson's little curtain lecture, and gradually the whole atmosphere of the whole party changed.

"We must stop for a toast," I said, lifting my glass. "It is the rarest of privileges to drink to a queen, and I'm sure we all agree that she is the world's most beautiful."

We drank and applauded, and Professor Peterson said that now it was time for us to bow. So we all bowed.

"When my friends bow to me," said Veeva, glowing with pleasure, "I sing them this little song."

She sang a funny little melody with words we couldn't understand. Then she laughed and we got up and, after Professor Peterson had seated her most courteously, we all sat again.

It was working! She was responding so beautifully that we realized she must be someone of great importance.

We ceased to bombard her with our rapid-fire questions that had made her take refuge in evasion. And she was beginning to talk to us of her own free will.

Unfortunately Lady Lucille appeared at the door in time to spoil everything.

Professor Peterson did his best to draw a curtain over the early scene of

near-violence.

"We take pleasure, Queen Veeva," the professor bowed low to the girl, "in presenting to you Lady Lucille Lorruth."

Veeva smiled and responded with sparkling interest. "I'm very pleased, Lady Lucille. Is the term Lady not a title of distinction?"

Lady Lorruth answered coldly, "It's a title of nobility."

The reply was blunt and hard as an iceberg. At no time would Lady Lucille say, Your Majesty, or offer any of the symbols of obeisance which we were applying.

"Whatever your line of nobility may be," Veeva smiled, "I am happy to recognize it."

"My native England is one of the oldest nations in the world," said Lady Lucille proudly. "There is nothing in the North American hemisphere to approach it for age or importance."

"This is news to me," said Veeva. And she was growing serious. "Are you talking in terms of hundreds of centuries or thousands?"

Lady Lucille shrugged and turned to the captain. "What does she mean hundreds of centuries? Our time can only be counted in terms of sixty centuries."

"Yes, of course," the captain said, eager to reinforce Lady Lucille on what he considered to be a sure point of knowledge. "Two thousand years takes us back to the time of Christ. Four thousand more takes us to the beginning of time. All this counts up to—ah—er—about sixty centuries I believe."

The curiosity in Veeva's eyes was a picture. She looked from one to the other of use as if to say, "Do all of you agree? Is this your conception of time?"

But her answer was highly polite. "My highest respect to you, and to your subjects, Lady Lucille. Your modern outlook upon this world is most refreshing."

THE captain was ready to change the subject. "About those furs—"

"Oh, yes, those furs," said Veeva. "You all seem to be very much agitated. What is the difficulty?"

"I want my furs," said Lady Lucille. "My husband came here five years ago. He came for furs, but he didn't get back with them. They're here in this land, and I want them."

"Five years ago?" Veeva reflected. "It seems but yesterday. I think I can lead you to the cache where the treasure has been deposited."

"Good," Lady Lucille snapped. "We'll go at once."

"But the way is perilous. I'm sorry that I can't carry more than one or two extra passengers on my tiger. I advise you to stay with the ship, Lady Lucille."

Lady Lucille didn't take kindly to the suggestion.

"How far is it?" the captain asked. "Do we have to cross those mountains?"

"The trail winds through a valley," said Veeva. "But why be afraid? I'll lead you."

There was a long tense silence. Bitter suspicions in Lady Lucille's eyes were feasting upon the girl

"Would you take me?" Lady Lucille asked.

Veeva smiled. "Could you endure crossing the dangerous glacier? Could you—"

"I see through you," Lady Lucille broke in angrily. "You're coaxing me to go so you can hurl me off a cliff."

"Was I coaxing you?" Veeva laughed.

"You know I would never get back alive. You want to steal what is mine." Veeva's laughter subsided with a flush of embarrassment. Her eyes



Veeva looked at the chisel with haughty eyes

blazed with a will to fight but she held her temper. There was a hint of mockery in her fierce smile.

"Such talk! Are you truly a lady of nobility?"

"Where did you get those furs you're wearing?" Lady Lucille screeched. "I think you're a thief! My husband left me some special red fox—" And on and on she raved.

Veeva was bewildered that we should all sit there in helpless silence as if used to hearing such talk. She couldn't understand whether this was a game or some misunderstanding. Smiling, she refused to take it as a brutal insult, for had we not been treating her to honors?

"Do you indulge your nobility in these fancies as a sport? . . . I must be going."

Many of us instantly pleaded for her to stay. We tried to apologize for our Lady Lucille's conduct. The conference turned into pandemonium. Everyone was talking.

WHILE we tried to straighten matters out, some of us were playing our own personal games, trying to gain a word of favor from Veeva.

But the insults had been clinched by now, and they could not be undone. Veeva walked briskly to the door.

She turned and quieted us with a stinging speech.

"I have had enough of your silly nobility. It carries no weight with me. Your race is too young and raw to have any pride. My own race is as old as these mountains. I have been the queen for thousands of years. I can't be annoyed by a little passing rudeness. *So soon you will all be gone!"*

"Gone?" Lady Lucille echoed. "Gone?" She repeated it over and over like a crazy parrot caught by a single word.

"In three or four centuries," said Veeva, "you may have more reason for pride. If so, come back to me again—or send your great-grandchildren. I will still be here, riding these icy mountains."

We stood there gaping. No one knew what to say.

Veeva herself gave us our cue.

"Bow to me, if any of you are still my friends . . . Bow to the Queen of the Ice."

I bowed and the deepest of reverence was in my gesture. I do not know how many of the others bowed. When my eyes lifted I saw Veeva riding away in a flurry of snow.

CHAPTER XV

A Valley Under a Roof

"I'LL follow her," said Shorty.

Within the next half hour as many as a dozen of us left the ship and started the uncertain trek across the field of ice.

We started together. But soon we had split into several groups, and some of the slower ones turned back.

Shorty and Professor Peterson and I managed to keep pace with Gandl, who had agreed to lead us part way.

It was a darkened world, but there was a bright glow from the stars, and the white snow had left a good trail. Our course led in a wide semicircle back to the south.

"That looks like the same valley we saw from another direction—Steve and I," said Professor Peterson. "I can see some of the same ice-mounds."

His eyes were better than mine. Even with his telescope I had difficulty spotting that row of ice domes. Our panorama took in a wide semicircular valley with black patches of mountains showing through the vast humps of blue snow.

The trail was fresher with each hour of travel, until at last we knew that Veeva must be riding only a short distance ahead of us.

We were tempted to call. But we remembered, and plowed on in comparative silence.

At last we overtook her.

She was waiting at the entrance of a deep crevasse. As soon as we were close enough for her to identify us she cried her greetings. But the remark she addressed to Gandl was brief and mysterious.

"You? . . . I'm surprised."

We followed in her wake and found ourselves descending between vertical walls about five feet apart. The footing was perilous. Little stream of water slid over the smooth blue ice. The canyon rose high above us. Its depth was hard to gauge. I remember looking up and guessing that we were two hundred feet beneath the tops of the walls.

This fissure must have been formed by a very sudden break in the backbone of ice many years ago. The walls showed signs of much weathering. Countless footmarks of the tiger were embedded in the irregular floor upon which we were traveling.

This was delightful. After these many weeks of looking down on fields of ice, this was like a new world. My eyes were seeing colors that they had forgotten, streaks of purple mingled with the straight hard surfaces of blue which rose in frozen sheets on either side of us.

Sometimes we could hear trickling waterfalls or low roar of rivers beneath the glaciers. And Veeva would pause to tell us of the vastness of these wonders we could not see, as if she knew them all.

I lost all sense of direction, almost all sense of time. We stopped occasionally for food and rest. This journey must have taken two days or more. We were still descending.

"And you are still coming, Gandl?" Veeva would say each time she waited for us to catch up.

"I am very much with you, still," Gandl might answer. Or perhaps he would only nod and look intently at her, with the bright fire blazing in his eyes.

AT length our tunnel widened into a sort of reception room. There were signs of habitation here. The floor had been backed with stones in somewhat regular formation. Light somehow reflected down through the irregular icy formations overhead.

They were like massive chandeliers. They added to our sense of wonderment. But they were deadly peril. As we proceeded along this wide reception room a freak crash would thunder against our ears. Then we would see through the blue reflections that one of these mammoth icicles had fallen. Our hearts beat faster. Death threatened our every step.

An hour later our way came upon steps hewn in the stone. There must have been thousands of them.

At this point Veeva's tiger wanted to run and she had trouble holding him back.

Shorty had almost passed out from fatigue. He was given the privilege of riding. How I envied him. The professor was following along back of me.

Abruptly he called to Veeva.

"What happened to Gandl?"

We all turned and our eyes tried to penetrate the gloomy blue darkness. Far back, high on the steps we could make out the figure of Gandl. He had stopped and was settling himself in a comfortable position against the stone wall.

We called to him and urged him to come on. What was the matter? Was he exhausted?

At this suggestion his laugh echoed mysteriously down through the narrow pass.

Veeva said, "He doesn't want to come. Leave him alone."

We proceeded on our journey. But I felt uneasy, going ahead without Gandl. And Veeva kept looking back through the long narrow stairway until our way leveled off and turned in a new direction.

Now that the footing was solid I trudged along almost unconsciously. I think I fell asleep while walking.

Awakening, I was aware that Shorty and Veeva were still carrying on a conversation in low tones, barely audible above the swish of our footsteps.

Shorty was observing the bright-colored stones, imagining there were all sorts of precious gems in this unexplored region. Then I seemed to fall asleep again and came to consciousness only when the sounds of other voices seeped in upon my hearing.

Everything was so utterly dark. I could hardly believe that I was not in the midst of some grotesque dream. But my sore feet were still pounding along over a hard path of ice or stone, and my aching muscles were no dream.

I rubbed my eyes. My sight adjusted to the strange dark light, not like any I had ever experienced before. It was iridescence that glowed from the very walls and the floor, from every promontory of stone.

This was no longer darkness. But it was utterly unlike sunlight. As I became used to it the effect was highly pleasing. The dim rocks took on a variety of colors—some of them shadowy, others scintillating against black backgrounds.

Shorty and the professor were silent. They were also drinking in the fairy-land beauty of the passing scene.

What attracted me most was a long row of black dots running horizontally along the wall. The design was very simple. Once when we came close enough to this continuous border I rubbed my gloved hand along to discover that it was made up of a series of gouges which had been cut into the living stone.

THE murmur of distant voices grew louder. At length I began to see the shadows of many people in the distance. I whispered to Peterson.

"Where are we? What does it mean?"

"A lost world!" the professor whispered. "Some runaway branch of humanity that has hidden itself away."

"There must be hundreds of them."

"Or thousands!"

It was like nothing anyone had ever dreamed—a colony of human beings could be living deep under a glacier.

I wished for Steve Pound. What would he have thought? Perhaps his hardheaded outlook, his commonsense knowledge would have been insulted.

But I was eager, now, for all my eyes could take in. Even though my mind tried to reject it.

Rivers ran along beside our path. Occasionally we saw plots of what appeared to be gardens. We could smell fresh green plant life and the brilliance of the plants were like emeralds.

We saw small four-wheeled wagons being pushed into little branch caverns that must have been mines.

We passed a group of workmen who were sitting in a circle eating from metal dishes. They were wearing light garments of furs. Their leaders wore special ornaments, including a Viking helmet and bracelets that might have gifts from some old Norsemen.

These people must have been well adjusted to the coolness of their climate. Many of them were not wearing

gloves. They were going about their work casually; to them this was obviously the normal manner of living.

A group of girls, crossing our trail ahead of us, stopped to bow to Queen Veeva—and they were happy and proud in doing so.

But our appearance caused great interest and curiosity among all these people. As we passed on, they broke into excited jabbering in a language we could not understand.

Veeve dropped a few explanations along the way.

"Your manner of talking is comparatively new to us down here," she said. "Many of my people have not had the chance to study it. But I the Queen must know all languages. So must the Firemakers. Otherwise, how would we know how to deal with our prisoners?"

"Prisoners?" Shorty gulped, turning chalk-white.

Veeve smiled proudly. "Only with this most indispensable tool, *language,* was I able to deal properly with your friend Lord Lorruth when he and his party trespassed on my hunting ground."

"Then he's here?" I blurted. "He's your prisoner?"

"For life," said Veeva merrily. "Wouldn't you like to join him?"

CHAPTER XVI

Cells for Enemies

"THESE people you see," Veeva continued, "are preparing to harvest these crops. Ever since our nation took refuge in the caverns under the ice we have managed to cultivate a goodly quantity of grains and vegetables. From the streams we get our meat, and also from the ice fields high over our heads."

Beyond a high triangular doorway we saw a tall gaunt man, clad in ornamental furs, walking along in a manner of great importance. He was being attended by six boys. He would send any of them on errands to make stone marks on a mound of ice at the foot of the wall. They would come and go at his beck and call.

Then he would stop and instruct them. His language was this same conglomeration of sounds that didn't fit into any foreign tongue I had ever heard. Suddenly he veered into English and I caught his words, and we paused to listen. He was too intent on his task to notice us.

"Hear me, boys," he said. "This is the new *code* of our enemies. If you would walk from our world into theirs they would greet you with words like these. Do you understand me?"

Some of the boys understood, others asked to have the words repeated. The tall man went over his statements carefully.

"You see," he said, "our enemy knows that we have learned some of their codes, so they must change their style of talk. They do this so they can confuse us. But if we know their new code we will understand their plans to kill us."

At this point Veeva called out to the tall dignitary. "Hello there, could the enemy spies understand you if they were listening?"

The tall man jerked about in great surprise. Our presence disconcerted him. His mouth moved nervously and his black broom-straw beard waggled, but for a moment he couldn't speak—in our code or any other. He struggled to recover himself and took a few steps toward Veeva.

"Our beloved Queen!" He bowed low and the six boys surrounding him followed his example.

"Arise, Firemaker," Veeva said. The

tall man came to his feet. The boys remained in a kneeling position.

"We welcome you. If I had known you were coming, a celebration would have been ready."

The tall man bowed again. Then he and the boys arose.

"Conduct me to the Red Room," said Veeva.

"You will not first go to the King?"

"I think not, Firemaker," said Veeva. "Is he still sleeping?"

"Of course," the Firemaker replied. "If you have been up among the mountains and skies, you should know whether he will go on sleeping. Is the sun shining yet?"

"No," said Veeva.

"Just as I thought," said the Firemaker. "The enemies have not departed, so the king will go on sleeping."

Veeva agreed with this, apparently, although she seemed unworried by this mysterious enemy.

Shorty interrupted to ask what kind of people these enemies were and where they came from.

"Where did *you* come from?" Veeva rejoined. "What kind of people are *you?*"

For some reason this confused conversation made me feel that I was on my way to be hanged. If so, I would be an easy victim, for I was already half-dead from exhaustion.

I was placed in a cell by myself.

OF the ceremony which followed, I saw little. I could hear the sound. I could catch echoes of curious folk songs. And when my eyes looked across the vast expanse of colored light which was obviously the Red Room, I could catch glimpses of the shadowy figures of these natives moving through their weird dances.

I'm glad to say that the temperatures which prevailed overhead had been escaped. Here the air was warm and drowsy. Soon after I had been locked in the cell I went off to sleep.

That sleep must have extended over many hours. Perhaps twenty-five or thirty.

I awakened intermittently. The metal dishes of food placed before me were delicious. Food and sleep—what luxury. But after my strength returned I was angry with myself, for failing to watch the native ceremonies.

At last my siege of snoozing was over. I roused up and sauntered to the doorway of my cell.

The curious light which I have already described seemed to come from every surface of stone. My room was a high-ceilinged prison about twenty feet in circumference. The single doorway was closed by means of a huge slab of rock which had been carved through with long narrow ornamental slits.

There must have been several such cells. To my right, in a semicircular alcove, I could see five or six of these doorways, all of them prisons.

I suddenly caught echoes of a low conversation within a few feet of me. I recognized the voice of Shorty.

"We could go into a circus," he was saying. "I'd be a trick rider in no time."

Then I heard the low laughter of Veeva. My pulse jumped. I crowded against my stone door, trying to see. But Shorty's cell door must have been flush with mine. I listened.

"You'd be surprised," Shorty said, "how much money we could make, and we'd be famous too, and we'd wear yellow tights and everybody would shout and clap and whistle for us."

Then Veeva answered. Something that I couldn't hear.

"Don't you think that he could get used to me?" said Shorty. "He didn't

mind my riding down the steps with you."

I thought at first that Shorty was referring to the king, and I thought, The crazy fool, trying to horn in ahead of the king. Doesn't he know he's in jail, and the king might ask for his head?

"He gets awfully hungry sometimes," I heard Veeva say. So the tiger was complicating Shorty's prospects.

Shorty's voice grew serious. But I don't think he was getting along very well. Veeva's amused laughter testified to that.

I did some tall thinking. Pretty nervy of Shorty for him to hope he could win a girl like her. The rube! Offering a queen a circus! If I couldn't do better than that—but just wait. Maybe I'd have a chance!

Now the low conversation came from a different cell, and I knew that she was talking with Professor Peterson. She was simply inquiring about his health and comfort, so far as I could gather.

PRESENTLY Veeva came to me. Her beautiful face was at the doorway. Through the grill of carved stone her beautiful eyes were smiling upon me.

My resolution to declare my love faltered. Had she come to mock and ridicule? Wasn't she barely repressing her quick laughter?

But no, her eyes were gazing at me intently. She said in a low serious voice, "Are you quite comfortable, Jim McClurg?"

"Frankly, no. I want to get out of here."

"Have you had food and rest?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm ready for a journey back out. When do we go?"

"Why do you want to go back?" she asked.

"I don't feel safe," I retorted. "For all I know, the cell may crumble down on me at any moment. I don't know these people. They make me nervous—all their music and jabber, and their big fierce faces. Who are they?"

"My people," she said simply. "Are you afraid of them?"

"Yes."

"You're very suspicious," she said, reaching through the stone bars to press my hand. "I would be glad to acquaint you with this world, but I must tell you at once, forget all about going back. Drop it from your thoughts."

I felt very much like a trapped animal.

I didn't want to suspect Veeva of treachery. It's very difficult to gaze upon a girl so beautiful and think evil of her. The heat swept my brain. I somehow controlled my temper, but only because there was a scheme in the back of my mind.

"How long have you lived here?" I asked.

"All my life."

"How far away have you been?"

"Many miles," she said. "Even many weeks' journey, traveling with Whitey. I know all of the coasts and all of the mountains."

"Have you ever been down into Labrador?"

Her silence was as good as a negative answer. I tried other localities.

"Have you ever been to the United States? Have you seen Hudson Bay? Have you even been to the southern tip of Greenland?"

Only Greenland struck a responsive chord.

"If that's as far as you've gone," I said, "you've much to see. The whole wide world is waiting."

"I have all the world I want," she said. "How could any world be more beautiful than this world?"

"There are mammoth cities. There are lighted streets. Swift traffic that rolls on wheels. Machines that carry voices and machines that throw post-card pictures on the wall—wonders that you've never dreamed of."

Now Veeva was laughing at me. "I heard such talk before," she said. "So many of our enemies who come intending to spy upon us try to tell me these things. I am only amused. These are traps to lure me into the enemy's hands. But I am the queen, and I am too clever to be captured."

I gave back her laugh of ridicule. "And you accuse me of being suspicious!"

She started to draw her hand away. I held it tightly.

"Is there anything more you wish to say?" she asked.

"Only that I'm terribly in love with you," I said.

Her eyes widened, a high color rushed to her cheeks. But she made no reply. She drew her hand away—though I fancied that it lingered for an instant as I brushed my lips against it.

At once she was gone, and I was never so much alone.

CHAPTER XVII

A Lord at Large

"YOU ought to be ashamed. You frightened her away," came a voice from my left.

"Steve Pound!" I gasped. "Are you alive?"

"Righto. More than ever."

Steve's big blond countenance was before me, peering in through the carved stone gate. I tried to tell him he was a ghost but he denied it, reaching through to shake hands with me.

"You fellows didn't need to come," he said. "I was doing all right."

"Just what we figured," came Shorty's voice from my right. "It's no fair, Steve. I want that gal myself."

"I'm not talking about the girl," said Steve, and he sauntered on down the row of cells to greet Shorty and Professor Peterson.

Shorty must have been pretty badly stung over his recent talk with Veeva for he hopped on Steve with lively accusations.

"You've fixed things so she'll hardly talk with me," Shorty complained. "She laughs at everything I say."

"She brought you down here alive, didn't she?" said Steve. "You've got nothing to complain about. Did you see that row of ice domes along the valley trail?"

"From a distance," said Shorty.

"I got to see inside some of them," said Steve. "Men were frozen to death in those traps five years ago. I saw some of the remains. It's enough to make a fellow watch his step."

I heard Shorty gasp. "Who—who were they?"

"Members of Lord Lorruth's expedition—men that got too fresh and made a play for Veeva."

"Gee-gosh!" Shorty groaned, and he expressed my sentiments precisely. "I better be careful how I talk."

"Any guy who feels like getting too friendly with the queen of these parts had better go out and take a look at those scattered skeletons."

I called Steve back to get the matter straight.

"It's murder," I said. "I won't believe it of her. After all, what man can look at her without falling in love? Is it any crime if a fellow's heart turns a flip-flop?"

"You'd better tie a rock to that heart of yours," said Steve. "But maybe you're right about her. These ice traps aren't straight murder. Anyhow she

claims they *just happen.* When men start yelling at her, she can't help it if a dome of ice forms to hold 'em off."

"She can't?" I was highly dubious on this point, in spite of my anxiety to clear her character.

"But if those instantaneous igloos didn't happen," Steve went on, "she admits she'd have a lot more trouble keeping out of men's clutches. She's such a friendly thing, I figure this is nature's way of protecting her from the wrong men."

"I notice she hasn't flopped the ice over you," I observed, as the warmth of jealously rushed to my head. "I suppose you're immune. She doesn't even keep you locked up."

"I'm out on good behavior," Steve smiled. "That's what Lord Lorruth did for me. He warned me that if I attended strictly to business and didn't get any silly notions that the queen was interested in me—"

"*Who* warned you?" I gulped.

"Lord Lorruth. Here he comes now. Strictly a gentleman, that's his rule. I'll introduce you."

A TALL, bewhiskered, fur-clad gentleman was approaching. From his appearance, he might have been one of the natives. But his greetings were delivered with a mellow English accent.

"It is very kind of your gentlemen to make this trip in my interest." He bowed graciously, casting his earnest gray eyes around the alcove. He had evidently stationed himself where Shorty and the professor could also see him. "I hope it will not inconvenience any of you if you are never allowed to return."

His manner was annoyingly mild and pleasant. It seemed to me that he might as easily have said, "We'll take pleasure in burning you at the stake. I hope you'll be happy about it."

Steve hastily supplemented this ominous remark.

"Lord Lorruth doesn't mean that just the way it sounds. He only means that now that we're all in his confidence, we couldn't be allowed to go back and tell his secrets."

"That's right," the tall elderly man smiled. "For my own part, staying right here is quite the easiest way."

I couldn't swallow all this without considerable gulping. Lord Lorruth wasn't old. His shaggy whiskers and eyebrows were only slightly gray. Once out of this lost world, I thought, he would have thirty years of pleasant living before him.

"These friends of mine can be trusted," Steve was saying to Lord Lorruth. "And as soon as they settle down and prove they're not vicious agents of the enemy, Veeva will have them released from their cells."

"But they will still remain down in this world," Lord Lorruth added confidently.

"Of course—unless these people change their mind about the enemy."

"What's all this enemy talk?" I heard Professor Peterson demanding in an irate tone.

"It's a notion of theirs about an army of invaders," said Steve. "All five of us are a part of that army. As near as I can make out, they think there's a whole avalanche of warriors up on top waiting for a chance to crash the gates."

"Absurd!" I said. "No army would ever come up to this waste land."

"But these people never lack for evidence that their enemy is real," Lord Lorruth asserted. "The fact is, there have been many parties of visitors recently. To be sure, most of them, like twelve of my men, have been turned to ice before they ever start down the steps."

The professor was disturbed by this

talk of other visitors recently. He wanted to know what Lorruth meant by "recently."

"In the last seven or eight centuries," said Lord Lorruth casually. "Recently enough to give the queen a smattering of modern languages—Latin, Scandinavian and English. Come along, Steve, if you want to help me with that packing."

"Then you've come to a decision," said Steve mysteriously. "All right, let's get busy."

CHAPTER XVIII

Firemakers' Fears

"PACKING! Packing! Packing! I snorted angrily. "What the devil did Lord Lorruth mean by that?"

"You explain it," said Shorty apathetically. "I'm busy pining over a lost love. But don't tell her, for gosh sakes, or she'll put me in cold storage."

"Do you know what I think?" I raved on. "I think Lord Lorruth and Steve are going to get a nice sweet tiger ride right back to the *Aurora* and leave us here stranded."

"You ought to knew Steve better than that," the professor snapped, making me half ashamed.

But I was in a cell and Steve was out, and I was more than a little jealous and wrought up. I argued that his talk about liking to stay here was only so much cake frosting to make us content with our fate.

Shorty decided the whole underground population was crazy. But Professor Peterson declared we were both being very absurd.

He reminded us that these people were working with fine teamwork. There were no idlers—not even among the high and mighty Firemakers. There was a systematic division of labor. The artisans were highly skilled as evidenced by their careful gardening, their highly artistic metal works, and their immense engineering achievements—huge triangular doorways, roof supports, and ice dams.

The Firemakers paid us a visit.

There were five of them. They were among the oldest of the men. All of them had strong fierce faces, coarse beards, deep-set eyes, powerful muscles. They would talk in low guttural voices as they discussed our fate.

One of them looked through the stone apertures at me.

"We know your new code. We can talk it as well as you. We have had it for two hundred darknesses."

By this I understood him to mean years. Their seasons came and went with the arctic days and nights. I discussed this code with him.

I tried to tell him he was only speaking my native tongue, the only one I had ever known. He considered my explanation subterfuge. He called the other four Firemakers over and repeated my excuse to them.

"But it's true," I declared. "I've come here with no knowledge of any enemy that might seek to harm you."

"That is exactly what I expected. An enemy," said the tallest of the Firemakers. "Don't strain yourselves in protesting your innocence."

Then I lost my temper. "I don't mind being insulted," I said. "But this is too much. I challenge you to prove that any man of us intends any harm. You don't believe me! All right. Go back and capture some of the others. Bring them here. Question them. They'll all tell you the same as I. We came here searching one lost fur trader and his party."

The Firemakers exchanged doubting glances.

"How soon," I demanded, "are you

going to let me out of here?"

"Let you out? That is a simple request."

ONE OF the Firemakers gestured to a group of small boys and together they tackled the huge slab of stone. Slowly it rolled to one side.

"Now," said the Firemaker, "you are out. What do you want to do about it?"

"I want to go home," I said, "and I can whip any man that tries to stand in my way."

"You're a very rough fellow," said the Firemaker. "We don't like to waste our hands on the grim business of fighting. But if you want to fight, take your anger out on these boys."

The group of lads, ranging from eight to twelve years of age, turned on me with their fierce little eyes and began doubling their fists.

"No," I protested. "Not these little fellows. But I'll take on the biggest of you."

The tallest of the Firemakers snapped his fingers and the seven or eight boys flew into me. I had a fight on my hands whether I liked it or not. I tried to wave them away. They tackled me around my ankles, flung themselves at my neck. They were all over me like a pack of wolves. I got a tight grip on the huskiest lad and began hurling him about, trying to knock off the others. But the lad was too strong.

They tightened their grips on my arms and legs and flung their weight at me until I was swerved off balance. I went down under the dog-pile and they began pummeling me.

Even when I had a chance to strike a solid blow I couldn't do it. Not against these boys. This may have been the reason the tallest Firemaker suddenly called them off.

"I believe you now. You want to fight a man. That proves that you are no coward. But it proves too that our enemies are highly dangerous, if you are a fair example."

"Show me the way out of here," I demanded. "I'm leaving at once. Turn my pals loose—"

"Not so fast," said the Firemaker. "If we let you go back, all our enemies will know that *we* know their new language. This is our protection. We will not give away this secret, so we will not let you go back."

Then I saw the face of Professor Peterson gazing at me from his cell. He was shaking his head, warning me to quiet down. I walked back into my cell.

"All right," I said. "Roll the stone back in place."

The Firemaker laughed. "Very wise of you, my enemy. We will release you in due time, if your behavior is good."

TWO meals, a period of sleep, a few hours of silent waiting and wondering—then Veeva!

Veeva gave us the privilege of attending the council of the Firemakers.

The affair began with a feast. Veeva made it a lively, happy occasion, and whenever she laughed the Firemakers would have to laugh too—though some of them did a pretty sorry job of it. The laughter was pretty thin after being strained through their bushy black whiskers.

Often Veeva's eyes would sparkle squarely at me, and once she quickly glanced at her hand as if she hadn't forgotten that I had tried to kiss it.

The Firemakers were full of noisy talk. Much of it was in our own language. Gradually we began to gather the threads of superstition which prevailed.

These people had believed for many, many years that some strange dangers awaited them. I tried to gauge the time which their fear had encompassed. This was impossible. When I talked in terms of Viking days, I learned that such times were recent to them.

These superstitions were a part of the fabric of their lives. It is hard to believe that people could believe in mortal fear year after year. Especially when no actual dangers beset them. But this fear had become engrained in their whole routine of life.

Where had it come from? How could it be dispelled?

Professor Peterson picked up a clue. "What did you say," he asked, "about the coming of darkness?"

The Firemaker replied. "The darkness is a proof that our enemy is waiting," he said. "We must stay underground until all darkness is banished."

The professor gave me a funny look. This was incomprehensible. After all, there are no people in the world who are not accustomed to a certain regularity of darkness and light. Whether it is made of simple day and night, twelve hours each, as is the case on all continents toward the equator, or whether it is made of six months light or six months darkness as is the case on either pole, the inevitable succession of these phenomena is universal.

THE professor checked this point with a few telling questions. Yes, this was their belief that the coming of the arctic night was in itself a proof that the enemies were still at hand waiting to demolish them.

Peterson whispered to me, "Do you suppose there are any books or records in this world? Can we trace it down, Jim? This freak notion has had a beginning. They haven't made it out of thin air."

"It's amazing," I admitted, growing more curious every minute. "These people seem to have lived here for centuries."

Now it came our time to offer our bows of obeisance, and I felt extremely awkward.

Peterson set the pace by bowing to the floor. He actually placed his face against the surface of stone. There he waited until Veeva sang her little song with the jumbled words.

The wholehearted manner in which he carried out his gesture of respect was a lesson to me. I felt that Shorty and I were a pair of sentimental boobs, hopelessly in love, but missing all the tricks that really counted with a queen.

But Professor Peterson had been a student; he knew the ways of many races and tribes, and his knowledge was serving him in good stead.

Now Veeva invited us to speak our piece to the Firemakers if there was anything we wanted to say. Peterson responded with the utmost of suavity.

"I'm pleased with this hospitality. I bring you greetings from the world above. With your permission I would like to convey our greetings *directly to the King himself.*"

This speech pleased the Firemakers, and the tallest of them arose to make a dignified response.

"After the feast is finished," he said, "you will be conducted into the presence of the King. In fact, the King will desire to pronounce his judgment upon the three of you."

This ominous forecast gave my heart a sudden jump. I said to myself, for once Professor Peterson overdid it. If he hadn't asked to see the king, we might have lived on long enough to figure out a loophole in this prison, and there would have been time for a break. But no, Peterson wanted his execution served up right away, and so we were

off to see the king.

CHAPTER XIX

A Rebel Returns

OUR procession was interrupted near a stairway by an excited clamor of voices.

A swarm of boys came down, rolling, tumbling, fighting, yelling. They had a prisoner—Gandl.

They forced him across the room toward us. Some guards shouted orders, and it was apparent that the Firemakers were amazed. Our reception had been mild compared to this.

Gandl broke away. The boys chased after him. They caught him and dragged him down. They were regular little savage demons. They fought like a pack of wolves.

Gandl, for all his strength, was no match for them.

I didn't know what it was all about but I couldn't see Gandl whipped. When the fight tumbled around in our direction I couldn't restrain myself. I jumped right into the fray and started jerking the boys off Gandl's back. There were twenty or more of them. It was a regular free-for-all. Peterson and Shorty both got into it. I heard Shorty yell for help and discovered that he was being tossed about by one small group of savages who threatened to tear him apart.

The guards pitched in too, before the fight was over. They had stone weapons—long tomahawk affairs with bone handles and stone mallets. It would have been unwise to resist.

Gandl had a tough fighting face, but there was always that mysterious something in his eyes, keen and intelligent. They dragged him to a table and there we all gathered around for the strangest conference I have ever attended.

At last we began to discover what Gandl's place was in all this affair. He was a runaway. He was a rebel. He was a fighter and a doubter. In every way he was a thorn in the flesh of these Firemakers.

Their questions to him brought out his story of runaway experiences. He had left for the first time five years ago. That was after he had talked with Lord Lorruth. Gandl's passion for exploring the outside world had run away with him. He had wandered southward.

From Greenland he had found a passage to the United States and now after all these years of knocking around the world he was returning to his native land of ice.

But as we sailors knew, he had not walked in expecting a glorious welcome. He had hung back to hide, to watch and listen from a distance, realizing it would be unsafe to show his face. For he had violated the traditions of loyalty and had deserted an important office.

This came out in our present conference. One of the Firemakers addressed him as "Gandl, the King's Advisor." But the tallest Firemaker sharply cancelled the title.

"Gandl is no longer the King's Advisor. He has renounced his right to that title."

"I had a more important service to perform," said Gandl.

"No service," said the Firemaker, "could be any more important than being the Advisor to the King. You have betrayed our whole nation. You have brought shame upon us by doubting our age-old beliefs."

"I not only doubt them," said Gandl stoutly, "but I bring back proofs that they are false."

This blasphemy so horrified the Firemakers and various officers that sat with us, I thought murder would be on the spot. I looked to Veeva, but ap-

parently it was not her turn to speak. She tossed her head and walked away, leaving the situation in the hands of these stony elders.

FOR a minute the only words were the fearful whispers which passed among the members of the council. The tallest Firemaker glared at Gandl and tried to look him down. The tall gaunt man's fingers were trembling. His lips were white. With an attitude of tremendous power, he placed his great arms at the side of the table and shouted.

"Gandl! I defy you to say one more word that would weaken our state against the enemies. Have *they* converted you? Have *they* filled your blood with poison? Have *they* shouted threats in your ears that you should come back to sell us into their hands?"

"There is no enemy," Gandl retorted in a voice as cold as ice. He leaned across the table to return the Firemaker's fierce stare. He beat his fists. He shouted, "You're fools, living down here in this frozen hell. You don't know what world lies beyond because you're afraid. There is no enemy! There has been no enemy for countless centuries."

"It's a lie!" the tall Firemaker screamed.

"It's the truth." Gandl's dark eyes blazed hot fire. "I challenge you to follow me, to go over the path where I have gone, to see the free people—"

The tall Firemaker couldn't stand it. In one furious leap he bounded to the stone table. A second leap and he threw his whole weight against Gandl. The two of them went rolling on the floor, snarling like a pair of bloodthirsty beasts. They tore at each other's throats. They cursed and snarled and fought with unabated fury. The tall Firemaker's fingernails slashed long red lines down Gandl's arm.

The other Firemakers gathered in upon them closely, eagerly. They were sure this would be the end of Gandl. But suddenly a shrill cry came from the lips of Veeva.

"Gee-olo-fro-goff!"

It was a language that I didn't understand—but a language so forceful that her utterance sent chills leaping through my spine.

Everyone turned. Veeva, the Queen, was standing beside her polar tiger. The big jaws of the beast were wide open, the teeth gleaming. Instantly the conflict came to a dead stop.

The tall Firemaker drew himself up to full height and began to back away. The other Firemarkers grouped around him and the boy servants lined up on either side of them.

The action had stopped, but not the emotional tension. We were lined up now like two armies. The Firemakers were fighting to hang on to their age-old traditions but Gandl had come home filled with new knowledge. His very eyes blazed treason.

This was all wrong—this life of theirs—and Gandl had come to tell them so. Naturally the professor and Shorty and I were with him one hundred per cent. I only wish that Steve and Lord Lorruth had been with us—but they had evidently gone their own way hours ago.

Here between the two warring camps stood Veeva herself, with one arm around the throat of the ferocious white beast. She was the balance of power. If she favored one side more than the other she concealed it. And now as so often before she applied her most potent weapon. She laughed.

NO one else could laugh. The rest of us were too weak, too much partisans of this struggle. Her laughter

was her power and she made us feel ridiculous.

Then suddenly she whipped out a brisk speech, aimed squarely at the Firemakers.

"You clumsy polar bears. Are you trying to amuse me with your wrestling match?" She ruffled the tiger's ears. "On my left I have Whitey. On my right I have my sword. *I promise death to the first man who threatens Gandl without my permission.*"

No one was quicker to pretend recovery than the tall Firemaker. He and the other dignitaries bowed low and assured the queen that they were her most humble and loyal of servants. What would she command?

"Sit down. Place yourselves at the table and listen to me."

They obeyed.

She told them that they must listen to Gandl's report. But they would not have the *privilege* of deciding his fate until the King himself had been consulted.

The tall Firemaker answered with a slight tone of sarcasm.

"Do you intend to wait until the King has awakened?"

"You know the answer to that one," said Veeva sharply. "When have we ever waited for the King to awaken before we consult him on matters of importance?"

"But you know the rules. Only the King's Advisor can consult him through a mingling of their dreams."

There was considerable discussion about this point. I gathered that the King had been sleeping for a very long time. It seemed, however, that these people believed his opinions could be learned by his Advisor, even though both were sleeping. That is, the King's Advisor held his special office by virtue of being able to enter into the King's own dreams. Then, upon awakening the Advisor could tell the Firemakers what the sleeping King wished.

"But how can we enter into his dream when we have no loyal Advisor?" the Firemakers protested. "Gandl has turned traitor. He is no longer qualified to receive the King's dream."

But Veeva quickly topped this argument. "Whether he is a traitor or not is for the King to decide. Have you Firemakers lost your power? Can't you still whisper your questions to the King as you have always done?"

All the Firemakers nodded in the affirmative. This was their special power.

"Very well," said Veeva. "You will hold a whispering ceremony at once. You will tell the King that we are questioning the loyalty of his Advisor."

"And how will we know his answer?"

"You will tell him," said Veeva, "that Gandl is ready to lie down on the stone near his bed, to dream with him. If Gandl is no longer loyal, the King is to strike him dead."

CHAPTER XX

The King's Prolonged Nap

BEFORE the Firemakers could recover their tongues, Veeva pressed on with her swift challenge.

"Do you understand me?" she snapped. "If the King does not strike Gandl dead that proves he is loyal. Accordingly we may believe the dream which Gandl receives."

I saw a faint smile on Professor Peterson's lips. It was indeed a most intriguing plan. I didn't know whether Veeva had conceived it in innocence or whether she realized her stroke of cleverness. I wondered—

But my own thoughts became a turmoil. Up to this point I had assumed that all this talk of dreams was someone's flight of fancy. But when I

stopped to take stock of the strange things that had already occurred I dared not be too skeptical. My complacency gave way to fear. Perhaps this agreement would spell tragedy for Gandl.

Might the King actually have the power to deal death even while he was sleeping? So far as I knew he might.

We were taken back to our cells. There was a long period of waiting. We saw only the guards for many hours. Work had ceased. The chattering boys had taken themselves to their separate homes, which consisted of branches of the cavern off the main stream.

Professor Peterson was highly excited. He kept talking in terms of faraway races and cultures. He was very curious about these superstitions, and wondered if they, like many of the artifacts of this region, were related to those of the early European cavemen.

He compared their tools, their weapons, and their art, and declared these people must have a definite kinship with the Cro-Magnon cultures of a few thousand years ago.

Now I was impatient with Peterson. I wanted to get out. I felt sure that Steve had escaped or would, soon.

But could I get Professor Peterson to help us lay a plan for escape? It was next to impossible. You would think he was a treasure hunter who had already come into his caveful of precious gems, from the way he was talking.

"Those dots along the wall—did you notice them, Jim?" he asked.

"Fancy ornaments, all right," I said, "but how does that help us get away?"

"Those dots came to an end right there in the middle of the Red Room," Shorty recalled.

"But why should they? Why didn't the artist carry them on along the whole wall? There must be some reason. And their stone dishes. Have you studied them carefully, Jim? I never saw any like them outside a museum. Once when I was in Heidelberg looking over the old Cro-Magnon relics—"

Shorty broke in with a troublesome topic that had been bothering me all along.

"This business of the King that don't do nothing but sleep—I don't get it. What makes him sleep so much?"

"I don't know," said Peterson. "That's another thing I'd like to find out before we leave."

"What gets me," said Shorty, "is that Veeva is married to such a lazy goof. You'd think a girl like her wouldn't stand for it."

"I quite agree with you," said Peterson.

SHORTY pursued this point. "Gosh, just think of it. Here she's been all gone all these weeks and when she comes back and they have a celebration for her and everything what does the King do? He keeps right on sleeping."

The professor said, "If you boys weren't in such a hurry to get away, we might pick up some of the most colorful ethnological data ever discovered. Don't you see what we have here—a rich vein of primitive culture. Somehow it has escaped the erosions of time. The modern age hasn't touched it. It's pure and unadulterated and beautiful in its simplicity. It may hold for science the answer to thousands of mysteries."

Shortly blinked his bugging eyes. "Could you say that over?"

"I mean," said Peterson, "that if we learned about these ceremonies we might go back to the big universities of Europe and America. They would like to know about these things. This ritual of dreams is the most innocent artifice I've ever run across."

"The thing that's got me going round

and round," I said, "is their talk about *time*. You'd think that they'd lived here for ages."

"Perhaps they have."

"But *these* folks haven't. You know this girl Veeva can't be more than twenty or twenty-two years old."

"My guess is eighteen," said Shorty.

"Anyway," I persisted, "she talks like she'd lived a thousand years."

There was a long silence.

"I wonder where Steve and Lord Lorruth are?" Shorty murmured drowsily.

"Under a mound of ice somewhere, frozen to death," I offered out of a growing mental gloom.

"I wonder if Lady Lucille is plumb crazy for keeps."

"She's probably chasing the Frabbel brothers with a knife."

"It'd serve 'em right," Shorty grunted. "I wonder . . . I wonder if the King and Veeva were happy together before he went to sleep . . . I wonder if he could ride a trick mule."

"It's a curious pattern," Professor Peterson resumed presently, as if he had wakened up the middle of a half-completed lecture, "but as you gentlemen doubtless know, primitive people are the most frightened people in the world. They live by their fears. They build up their whole religion over some peculiar obsession. The slightest incident may be magnified into a powerful taboo. And it's happened here undoubtedly."

"You mean their fear of enemy?" I asked.

"That's it," said Peterson. "Somehow they have associated the six month darkness with the approaching of dangers. It may have started ages ago but now look what a silly belief they are nurturing. Each time the year's sunlight disappears they insist that the enemy is again upon them. They are waiting for the time that a permanent light will come."

A GUARD, followed by a squad of boys, came trudging toward our alcove.

"Prisoners, where are you? Prisoners, where are you?" The guard went over his little sing-song rhythm. "Come out. Veeva wants to see you. Follow me."

His squad opened our doors, and he turned and walked off, confident that we would follow him. We did.

The Queen herself rode across the vast Red Room to meet us.

"Come, follow me. I promised that you would meet the King."

"Is he awake?" Shorty blurted anxiously.

The girl laughed. "We can't wait for that. I've been waiting for thousands of years for him to awaken."

"Thousands?" the professor asked gravely.

"Thousands," said Veeva.

Shorty jumped at the chance to pursue this topic.

"Thousands of years. Gee-Wilikins. Did he tell you it would be like that, or did you just figure he was droppin' down fer an afternoon nap?"

"I've never talked with him," the girl said.

"Never?" I gasped. "But at the time you married him you must have at least said 'I do' or something."

Veeva smiled at me and gave a funny little toss of her head as if these matters didn't concern her too much.

"I've no particular recollection of getting married to him. I only know that his sleep began before the ceremony, and he's never been awake since."

THE passage from the Red Room led into a narrow winding tunnel. Soon we were ascending steps that were

hewn out of the brightest pink stone. The walls, too, were a luminous pink. The color lent a magic to this winding stairway.

When we reached the top of the ascent, we seemed to be in complete darkness. Then our eyes adjusted, and the scene became half-visible. We were in a round blue-walled chamber, as spherical as if it had been cut with a diamond point.

Thin lines of deep blue light encircled us like windings of luminous blue wire. The room was about fifty-five feet wide. The ceiling was lost in the steamy blue darkness. A few stone benches could be seen, lined around the circular wall.

We spoke in whispers. Every breath, every whisper, every footstep echoed round and round.

"The Firemakers are here," said Veeva. "They are watching Gandl."

"Is he sleeping?" Shorty asked.

"That's all he does. It is such a sleep that you will think him dead," said Veeva. "But he is the King."

To her, that explained everything.

"How do you know that the Firemakers haven't killed him?"

Shorty's suggestion was shocking to Veeva. She was quick with a confident answer—an answer which was packed with superstition. "They wouldn't dare. If they thought of such a thing, the King himself would strike them dead. He sleeps with a jeweled dagger at his side."

"I see," said Professor Peterson, choosing to stifle any further questions from Shorty. When the professor found a guarded moment he whispered a bit of advice to us. We must not say things that would suggest any doubt to Veeva's faith in the King.

"Only Gandl has cut through this maze," Peterson warned us. "The girl is as saturated with it as the Firemakers themselves."

We sat on the stone benches, staring at the deep gloom in the center of the room. We were in the King's presence now. He was there on the coffin-shaped resting place, Veeva assured us, though I could scarcely see anything until she led us to the middle of the room.

The unbelievable was at hand. There lay Gandl on a simple slab of stone. That was his bed, right beside the King's. It was a full step lower and it made me wonder whether a King's dreams flowed downhill.

Now I could make out the figure of the King, a long slender form of darkness upon the highly ornamented bed of stone. For the moment I did not scrutinize his features, being more concerned with Gandl.

The light was too dim for me to be sure Gandl was breathing. He was as still as death. My heart skipped a beat. Could it be that the sleeping King had already acted?

But how could he? It was silly for me to fall into the spell of these ignorant superstitions. The power of any King, sleeping or awake, lies in the belief of his people in him.

We moved from Gandl to the more ornamental bed. The moment of meeting was at hand.

Veeva stood before us. Her manner was reverent. She was motioning us to look down upon this figure. This undoubtedly was the only person in the world to whom she was subject.

Then we gazed down at the shadows. I could make out a little dagger, bright with jewels, lying at the King's side. But the King was nothing more nor less than an old gray skeleton, crumbling in decay.

FOR a few minutes I did not realize what perils were impending. It was all silence that prevailed in this chilled

room of the cave. It was a frightening silence.

The King had lain there for thousands of years, a heap of dry bones. And yet, by the strange miracle of iron-bound tradition, he was the ruler of this lost civilization. And now once more he was about to exert his will.

The Firemakers sat rigidly, their cruel eyes burning fiercely through the darkness. They were like statues, but one could not easily forget that they were present. Peterson, Shorty and I retired to the farther end of the rounded room. I had edged around until the sight of Gandl came clearly. A dim light glinted off his profile, and there was a slow rhythmic breathing evident in the turning of reflected light over the iron muscles of his chest.

Shorty whispered to me, "How in hell can the King kill him?"

"The King *can't.*"

The round walls of the room echoed our whispers, and we dared say no more. But suddenly this whole situation came clear to me. I saw the ritual for what it was—gross superstition. And to think I had almost fallen for it!

Yes, the Firemakers had everything their way. All they needed to do was to destroy Gandl and their authority would remain unchallenged. They *would* destroy Gandl and somehow make the people believe the King had done it.

A sound of footsteps intruded. The boys were coming. Their chattering voices hushed as they approached the door of the King's room. I saw the tallest Firemaker gesture to his fellows to remain seated. Then he crossed to the entrance.

"What do you want?"

There was a low jumble of conversation in the language I could not understand. The tall Firemaker appeared to be relieved. He turned to his fellows.

"The ice roof is crumbling three rooms beyond the red corridor. Go! All help is needed." He turned to us. "You, too. Your help is needed at once. Follow the boys."

Terrifying chills raced through my spine. Nothing had frightened me more than the falling during our descent. I knew the ceilings could not be stable when there were such frequent evidences of breaks and faults in the overhead ice. And so for an instant I was taken in. We all moved toward the door—all except the tall Firemaker, who sauntered back, intent on remaining here.

I acted on impulse. I rolled under a low shelf of rock that had been left for a bench. Here the darkness was complete. The Firemaker could not see me.

He paced uneasily until the voices of the retreating party faded away. Finally he sat down on the stone bench. Again everything was deathly silent.

I hardly dared breathe. Among these round walls the slightest sound was dreadfully magnified. But I had a terrifying curiosity that made me want to crawl the length of this hiding place to make sure no one else was with me. A foolish thought. I had seen everyone go. There were only the four of us now —the tall Firemaker, and Gandl asleep, the dead King, and myself.

Was Gandl asleep?

The tall Firemaker was asking himself that question too, I knew. He must have been in doubt, or he would have committed a murder on the spot. Now he sauntered to the doorway, and his footsteps could be heard retreating down the hall.

This was perfect. It gave me a chance to know whether Gandl was asleep or only pretending. I made the most of my opportunity I crawled out of my shadowy hiding-place and crept

over to Gandl's side.

"Listen, Gandl. It's me, Jim McClurg. I am here watching you. There's no one on guard now except the tall Firemaker. Do you hear me?"

Gandl made no response other than a slight change in the rhythm of his breathing.

"I have something to say to you," I persisted. "You know their proposition. The King is supposed to whisper his will to you. But you know he can't do that. It's impossible. Do you hear me?"

CHAPTER XXII

Gandl Hears the King

GANDL breathed drowsily. "Go ahead. I'm listening. Are you the King?"

"It's me, Jim McClurg. Are you going to lie here and let them kill you?"

Such a heaviness of sleep was upon him that he must have been having nightmares. From his mumbling I gathered that he thought I was the King and that he welcomed my whisper.

"They are going to kill me if I don't get your message. They think you won't speak to me because I am a rebel."

That was my cue. I could not pass it by.

I whispered in a heavy authoritative accent that I thought a king might use:

"I am the King. I am talking with you, Gandl. Have you ever heard me before?"

"No, never. I have only pretended. This is the first time your voice has reached me. I never believed in you. I thought you were nothing but Death."

"But you do hear me now, and I have many things to say to you."

"I'm listening."

"First of all, you were right to leave this place and visit the lands beyond. Now that you have come back, you must tell these people what you have seen. There are no enemies abroad."

Gandl murmured happily, "No enemy. That's what I told them. I did not find anyone in the outside world who was not a friend." Then his tone changed. "But you are asleep, and if there are no enemies, why don't you awaken?"

This question stumped me. I had run into a trap of my own making, but I took a long chance.

"I can't awaken. I am dead. Whether enemies come or go, I shall always remain in a state of death. But you, Gandl, you must lead the people out of their ignorance."

"Have I the power? The Firemakers would not let me—"

"You must over-rule them," I commanded.

"Does Veeva know that you are dead?"

"If you tell her that I have come to you in this dream, giving you my last message, she will believe."

"I will tell her," said Gandl, "but will she not be heartbroken?"

My heart almost stopped beating as I realized what power lay in my hands at this moment. But I had already plunged, and if my trick failed, I would have earned death already. So I replied to Gandl with the bold answer that inflamed my mind.

"You must tell her that it is time for her to choose a new king."

"A new king . . . a new king . . ."

Gandl drifted back into the deep mists of sleep

I started to crawl back to the side of the room, but something stopped me. Echoing footsteps; the Firemaker was returning. I hastily hid myself under Gandl's low bed beside the resting place of the King. For many minutes I

watched the sandaled feet of the tall Firemaker as he walked around.

"Sleeping well, my friend?" the Firemaker whispered. Gandi made no response.

"The ice is falling in some of the rooms beyond. There is danger."

This suggestion apparently made no impression on the sleeping rebel. But I knew that the Firemaker was testing to make sure that his victim was sound asleep.

The sandaled feet came near to the stone bed right before my eyes. I knew that the Firemaker was hovering over Gandl now. From the stain of the angles I guessed that he was reaching.

Then I heard a metallic scraping over the King's resting place. That was the little jeweled dagger. The Firemaker had picked it up. Now he was taking a stance, his feet wide apart. The moment was at hand.

I STRUCK with all my force. My right arm swung like a mallet against the Firemaker's left ankle. With a flash of light, a silver sandal swept upward and the tall man went down. His metal bracelets clanked against the floor.

I rolled out from under the stone. My eyes were sharp for signs of the jeweled dagger, and my hands groped. But my only advantage was another strike at his ankles, and for the second time I hurled him off balance.

Then I saw that the weapon of death was still in his hand. He was bounding up, coming at me. In the dimness he was but three spots of light—a pair of fiery eyes and the gleaming blade.

I was on my feet now, and instantly I raced away to the far side of the elevated resting place of the King.

In doing so I left Gandl unprotected, and the poor fellow was still sleeping. How fatigued he must have been from his journey over the ice wilderness, or was he perhaps sleeping into death? Once more the grip of this underworld magic was upon him. Strange, that such thoughts could paralyze me in the brief seconds that held the fate of Veeva and her people in the balance.

Above all, Gandl must not be killed. For that would restore the Firemakers to power and exalt them and magnify their glory for generations to come.

The Firemaker glided to the edge of Gandl's stone bed, like a bird about to take flight. He was plunging over the top to me. Gandl and the King were merely his stepping-stones. Veeva should have seen that!

With upraised arm he plunged down at me. I flung myself at his feet once more, and he went sprawling across the floor. To my horror, some of the bones from the dusty old skeleton fell with him, for he had tripped over the King in crossing. As he lay there, momentarily stunned by his fall, I could see the decaying bones of the King's hand lying across his metal sandal. Somehow, that glimpse struck home. Even as I rushed forward, impelled to capture the dagger, I paused long enough to fling a hand at that bit of skeleton. It scooted under the stone bed.

That was a costly moment. I might have had my hands on the dagger, but the tall Firemaker was coming back into action in a flash. He rolled away from me and bounded up on his feet. I think I got in three or four blows over his head and back before he could wheel on me.

Instantly the chase was on again, and I was retreating. The room fairly roared with the noise of battle. It was enough to wake the King from the dead. How many times we ran around the regal resting-place, I do not know.

My moments were numbered. Once the blade ripped down across the back of my hand. My feet were like lead,

it seemed, and my breath was gone. I seemed to be guiding myself more by sound than sight, keeping out of range of the shadowy form, scowling and panting and growling threats in weird words that I could not misunderstand.

Then I picked up the only weapon I could lay my hands on— A bone from the resting place of the King. I hurled a thigh-bone full into the Firemaker's face. For an instant he staggered, then I was upon him, clutching the gaunt wrist which was frozen upon the dagger. We struggled back and forth in a deadlock. Once the tip of the blade cut the side of my neck. Until that moment I had hoped to knock out my enemy somehow, without doing him mortal injury. But it was kill or be killed.

Summoning all my strength, I forced him over the King's resting place. He tripped, and his long, shadowy body fell. I threw him on a twist. His elbow was under him as he went down, and the dagger plunged up through his chest.

CHAPTER XXIII

Gandl's Farewell to the King

HE was quiet. I shrank back to the wall, rubbing my hands, terrified over the hideous thing I had done.

I waited. There were no further sounds of breathing. Those little murmurings came from Gandl. I wonder what weird nightmares he had endured during his battle.

I could hear his voice becoming distinct.

"I will tell them," he said, "that you are dead. Veeva must choose another king. That's what I will tell them."

His words brought me to my senses. There was no time to lose. Even now I could hear a growing clamor of voices from a distance. The other Firemakers were returning. Again I whispered:

"You are right, Gandl. I, the King, am at last dead. But I must whisper to you one more secret. There was one Firemaker who would not believe what you are about to tell them. And so, as my last act, I have killed him. You must tell the others I have done this, and they will believe."

I hastily dragged the body of the tall Firemaker to the side of the room where he had previously stationed himself. His fur clothing had absorbed a part of his blood, so that no trail was left.

I returned to the King's resting place and recovered the skeletal hand. It was almost complete. One of the bones of the lower arm was attached, part of the little finger was missing. I closed this cluster of bones around the handle of the dagger, which still hung in the dead Firemaker's chest.

By the time the party returned the scene was in order. I was hidden. I held my breath, listened.

Veeva and the most loyal of her Firemakers were the first to arrive. They paused in the doorway. Gandl was mumbling.

"He is still asleep," Veeva said.

"Can you see him?"

"Our eyes will adjust to the light in a moment," said the friendly Firemaker. "Come—I will lead you to him. He is talking in his sleep."

The low mumbling went on for several minutes, and I could hear Veeva whispering to her companion as they tried to make out what Gandl was saying.

"Yes, I have heard your message," Gandl said. "Are you gone now? . . . Are you gone? . . . Come back, O King, and say these words to them. I am afraid they won't believe me. They call me a rebel. . . . What, you assure

me that they will believe?"

Other Firemakers appeared at the doorway and waited there, listening to this weird, one-sided communication. Veeva whispered to them to stay back.

"He is talking with the King. He is receiving some very strange message. He thinks we will not believe him because he is a rebel."

The friendly Firemaker added in an impressive voice, "Of course we will believe him. We have no other choice. Listen! I can almost hear the King whispering to him myself."

"Yes, O King!" Gandl murmured softly. "I will tell them that you have performed your last acts of service. . . . You have killed a Firemaker who would have refused to believe. . . . Yes, I understand. Your service is done. You are destroying yourself. . . . Farewell, O King!"

I WAITED until the murdered body was discovered, to make sure the circumstantial evidence was accepted. This, I knew, would be the supreme test of the Firemakers' faith in their own superstitions.

They were horrified, shocked, but unsuspecting.

I was satisfied. The evidence was scanty, and details couldn't be observed under the dim light. But Gandl, still lost in his dreamy trance, was behaving so perfectly that the observers were forced to listen to him. They were convinced that he was echoing the words of the King.

But now the King was only a scattered pile of bones.

No wonder, then, that Gandl kept calling for the King to come back and tell him more.

The alarming presence of the murdered Firemaker served to reinforce their superstitions rather than shake them.

"That's what comes of doubting," whispered the friendliest of the Firemakers, and the others listened to him respectfully. "This man, our Firemaker brother, remained here intending to supervise the conference of dreams. His doubt of Gandl, the Rebel, was likewise a doubt of the King. In fact, he hoped tc discredit Gandl's report. And so—*the King has spoken with the dagger.*"

There were murmurs of approval. A spell of awe held the group in a frigid grip. Any shaky faiths became solid on the spot.

And there I had my answer. Were the Firemakers sincere in their belief that this heap of dry bones held power over life and death? Indeed they were, if the King was in a mood to stab them for insincerity.

The bony hand still clung to the dagger, and several Firemakers kept watching for fear it might move.

Gradually these listeners pieced together the low mumblings of Gandl, and they realized what a tremendous event had taken place. The King had performed his last official act and had gone into a final death voluntarily.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Queen Is Interrupted

"OUR poor bereaved Queen!" the Firemakers began to whisper. "How can she endure this great sorrow?"

That was when I discreetly removed myself from the scene. I was a trembling mass of nerves, with just enough self-control to keep myself hidden. I couldn't stand to hear any more. I had bet on superstition and won. I had murdered and got away with it. But when these men began overflowing with condolences for Veeva

because a rattly old skeleton had been knocked to pieces—when they referred to it as her dear husband—well, it was all I could do to hold back an outburst of wild, taunting nervous laughter.

I slipped along through the dark corridors and hid myself whenever there was danger of meeting a group of boys or a stray workman. For once the thought of being locked securely in a cell was very appealing.

I found an icy spring of water back in a remote branch of the cavern, and there I bathed my wounds. My neck had scarcely bled, but I had gone to no end of trouble to avoid leaving blood tracks from my ripped hand.

I remained in hiding, and whiled the hours away in rest and troubled dreams. All the literary gems I had ever read about murder marched through my mind in a gruesome procession.

Four errand boys discovered me, finally, and demanded to know what I was doing here. I convinced them that I had lost my way.

"We carry words from your friend," one of them said.

Out of their broken English I was made to understand that Steve and Lord Lorruth—the latter in disguise—had made the perilous trip out over the ice with a party of workers— "To take big furs to some woman on ship. Much mad woman."

"How much mad?" I asked.

"Big much mad. Want more big furs."

"Did Steve and Lord Lorruth tell her they would bring her some more?"

"Tell her nothing. Lay furs on ice near ship. Hurry back. Woman yell at them, mad like falling stones."

"Then Steve and Lord Lorruth came back here?" I asked.

"Yes. Now in big Red Room to hear Queen make speech."

There were several thousand persons on hand, I found, listening to the pronouncements of Veeva the Queen. By borrowing a suit of furs from some native who didn't happen to be at home, I was able to edge my way into the vast assembly without attracting any attention whatsoever.

The honors for the departed King had already been sung. The Firemaker had been buried with a few guarded words of praise, I learned, and with some well-placed warnings about the dangers of trifling with authority.

So this part of the meeting was a public expression of sympathy for Veeva.

As much of it as I could understand burned me up with disgust. The absurdity of it! Veeva must be persuaded to choose a new King at once, to forget her awful grief!

Grief for that dusty pile of bones!

What would she choose for her new King? Another skeleton? I hoped she would pick a bright and shiny one, one that she could at least see in the eternal darkness of that round room of dreams.

The girl was speaking now.

MY SARCASTIC thoughts melted away at the sound of her voice. What magical beauty was hers! She was mounting a stairway that had been hewn in the side of the wall, and the glow of colored light sifted over her lovely face and form.

Whitey the Tiger was with her. It would bound a few steps ahead. But whenever she paused to speak, it would stand motionless, attentive.

The stairs led to a little balcony carved in the wall. Here, thirty feet above the crowd, Veeva and the white tiger were highlighted by a glow of pink light from the surrounding wall.

My worshipful trance was interrupted by a low-whispered conversation

of a group of natives close at hand. One of the Firemakers was among them.

"The falling ice from three rooms beyond? No, it was nothing serious," he assured them. "I regret that I left the King's dream to investigate it."

"But some are saying that more breaks are coming in a straight path toward this hall."

"We've been patching breaks for thousands of years," said the Firemaker. "Any King worthy of our beautiful queen will protect us."

The whispered talk was lost to me, for I was crowding forward to be nearer Veeva.

The bumping within my heart was like the pounding sea. A new daring had filled me. For Gandl and I had done murder. What act of boldness was I not capable of—*for myself?*

As I crowded forward I wondered whether Steve and the rest of the party were searching for me. Now that the furs had been recovered for Lady Lucille, would she not demand that we set sail for home the minute the winter ice began to break?

Undoubtedly Steve and Lord Lorruth had returned only to round up Peterson and Shorty and me. Well, I wasn't ready to go. Not just yet. My eyes were feasting on the most gorgeous object of art that I ever hoped to see, and a new fire was leaping within me.

Veeva's words flowed on like music. Most of the talk I couldn't understand. But the crowd was liking it, and their admiration for such a queen was wonderful to see.

She looked down at me and for an instant her words stopped, and she smiled faintly. Whitey leaped up to place his forepaws on the rail. Veeva recovered her broken sentence and went on, and Whitey relaxed.

In that moment I was saying to myself, "Before I leave this place I'm going to tell her. She may laugh, she may pity me, she may have me imprisoned in ice, but before she has time to think about that new King, I'll have her know I'm desperately in love—"

My thoughts broke off, for my eyes chanced to fall upon a group of dignitaries. There was Gandl among them, looking squarely at me. He may have read my thoughts. Or he may have sensed, with me, that someone's destiny was in the balance.

At any rate I guessed, in that instant, who the next King would be. I realized that the only thing that had stood between Veeva and Gandl in the past was the trifling difference between faith and skepticism.

Now, at last, Gandl might enjoy the full favor of these people, even though he was a rebel. For had the old King not done a murder in his behalf? *They* thought so.

Now Veeva repeated an announcement in English, and I caught my breath.

"When I speak to you again from these stairs, I will tell you who is to be the new King. But I cannot tell you now—for I do not know."

She concluded with a merry laugh, and the crowd laughed with her.

It was a welcome note of gaiety, the first that I had heard for many hours. But it was cut short.

CHAPTER XXV

The Queen Recalls

A HALF-TON slab of ice, bulging from a crack in the vertical wall, dropped. The crowd surged back as the ice struck with a crash and a spray of splinters.

There was a momentary vibration underfoot. The earth was trembling. A spider-web of cracks appeared in the

wall. Suddenly a section of the narrow stone stairs was falling.

Screams rang above the rumble of falling stones. The crowd became a flowing tide racing out of the path of danger.

But there was no general avalanche. The massive luminous walls defied the shudder. Only the fragile structures felt the shock—the wall ornaments, the carved shelves, the arcades and the ceremonial stairs. And there was Veeva—

"Kroff! Kroff!" The cry rang through the big room. It was the native word for "Jump!"

Just as the upper-stairs and tiny balcony rattled and cracked and broke loose, Veeva acted.

She leaped to the back of Whitey and slapped him on the neck. He pushed off with his paws and flew for the floor.

In that split second I saw a stray rock bounce from the wall and strike Veeva on the side of the head. That was why she fell. The crowd screamed. They couldn't understand it—Veeva the Queen falling from her mount in midair.

The tiger, I was later told, made a most graceful landing, and whirled about in surprise to see what had happened to its burden.

But I did not see. I was one of the few persons close enough to help break Veeva's fall. I rushed into the path of her descent with outstretched arms. We fell in a heap.

I was slow regaining my feet, if my memory serves me. But I was in no hurry, now, for Veeva was in my arms. Anyway I did manage to get up, and they tell me that I wouldn't let anyone help me as I carried her to the station of a native physician.

They tell me, too, that in spite of the crowd I kept murmuring soft words to her and kissing her. Shorty was somewhere in the crowd, and I was to hear from him later about this matter.

But what I chiefly remembered was that the crowd kept swarming around, directing me to an elegant room with luminous copper-colored walls, and that everyone was clamoring to know whether Veeva was all right. Her eyes were only half open, and her long fine hair floated against my bare shoulder, and she weighed lightly in my arms. She seemed to be telling the crowd that everything was all right by waving her hand weakly.

Hours later it was a quiet little party that surrounded the Queen of the Ice, lying quietly on the couch.

Back in the corner of the elegantly carved room was Whitey, ever silent, ever attentive. If Shorty could only have been half as mannerly! He was forever wanting to talk when I wanted to talk.

But the substance of that memorable conversation was between Professor Peterson and Veeva.

Veeva was still in a sort of stupor from the blow on her head. But she was talking—talking lucidly of many things.

"I'll want some of you to bear witness to these words," Professor Peterson whispered to us. "We're hearing some confession at last. She would never speak so frankly if she weren't out of her head."

GANDL'S eyes shone as he listened to these secret revelations. Part of the time Lord Lorruth and Steve Pound were present. And Shorty and I never missed a word.

"If you are still grieving over the loss of the King," said Professor Peterson to the girl, "I hope you will accept our sympathy."

"Most of all I am worried," said

Veeva, "about the woman on the ship. I have feelings that she means to harm me. . . . But I am not shaken by the loss of the King."

She talked on slowly, and her soft eyes seemed to be seeing pictures on the copper-hued ceiling. "I am grieving only for the people who trusted the King and believed in him."

"But aren't you grieving as a wife?"

"Why should I? Was he ever a husband to me? Have I ever heard his voice? Has he been anything but a symbol during all these past generations?"

"Then you have never been in love with him?" I asked. "Even when you married him?"

"That marriage," said Veeva, "is something I could never really understand. Did I ever tell you that I remembered a marriage ceremony?"

"You said it happened thousands of years ago, but—"

Shorty interrupted me. "But how could it?"

"That was an *earlier me—an earlier Queen Veeva*—one that I do not remember at all. I have only been told that it was me."

"Then you are not thousands of years old?" I asked.

"No."

"Betcha you're not a day over eighteen," said Shorty.

"I am supposed to be twenty-two thousand years old," said Veeva. "That was what the Firemakers told me when I was a little girl. They said I had been the Queen of the Ice all that time, and I would go on being Queen for thousands more years. But I know that this body of mine will die someday. And then—"

"You will keep on living?" Shorty asked.

"I'll be dead—as dead as anyone—all except my name. Some other little girl will become Queen Veeva, and the Firemakers will give her Whitey and teach her to ride, and she will learn to defend herself—"

"And to change voices into ice prisons?" Professor Peterson asked.

"That is not my doing," said Veeva. "It is one of Whitey's secrets. The other is his magical warmth. He is like these colorful walls that send out rays of light. But Whitey does not make light, he makes warmth—"

"Electrical," the professor interpolated.

"And when he wants to he can make voices freeze. I do not know how."

Lord Lorruth added his comment. He was not sure that anyone would ever know just how Whitey achieved this special miracle, but he was convinced that the tiger put the talent to good use. It was the rogues of his own party who had failed to heed warnings and had brought an icy death over themselves trying to to take advantage of Veeva.

"Is the tiger thousands of years old?" Shorty asked.

"No, he is simply the last of a strain," said Veeva.

GANDL nodded. When he was a small boy there were three such tigers, and there were stables for many more. He believed that this particular species had come down through the ages as friends of his own race, adapting to the ice the same as the people had adapted.

"That is true," said Veeva. "We have had them for our pets all these twenty-two thousand years. That is a part of the Queen Veeva memory that has been told to me."

Her eyelids wavered and fell closed.

"She wants to sleep," I whispered. "We'd better leave her."

We drifted out to the great spacious corridor beyond the entrance. Shorty

tried to be the last one out, but I herded him along to make sure he didn't linger. Then—

"Jim," Veeva called softly. "There's something I want to say to you."

My heart leaped, and my voice was gone. I returned to her bedside. It was almost the only moment I had ever been alone with her.

Well, once she had helped me up a snowy mountainside, and once she had stood at the door of my prison cell—

"I just wanted to thank you for—for catching me . . . I might have been killed . . . It's all coming back now. You carried me in here, didn't you?"

"With all my heart," I said, and I was suddenly bending down whispering to her, looking into her eyes, holding her lovely face in my hands. "I've a thousand things to tell you, Veeva—"

"I have ten thousand years to listen, Jim," she said with a taunting laugh, "but your voice won't last that long."

Why did she have to say that? She seemed to be telling me: "I am the Queen, with all the power, and you are one of these fickle males who try to make love to me. But you are my passing amusement, a thing of the moment. My life will go on for thousands of years."

Yes, she was herself again, and all those honest revelations she had made while out of her head were forced into hiding.

"All right, live on for ten thousand years," I said almost angrily. "Live a million years! Every minute of it I'll be madly in love with you."

I lifted her into my arms and kissed her. I have no way of describing just how I kissed her, except to say I meant this to be a moment she wouldn't forget in a million years.

"You'd better go, Jim," she said.

As I walked away she was not laughing.

CHAPTER XXVI

A King Is Chosen

THE thousands of people who made up this kingdom were as interested as any public is in the affairs of its government and its leading personalities.

This world was agog with excitement over the cashing in of the old King, as I have noted. At first this overshadowed the other phase of the double-barrelled explosion—the strange execution of the tall Firemaker.

But whereas the whole upheaval seemed to have been buried and covered over for keeps under the soft blanket of the memorial rituals, there was something under cover that wouldn't stay down. Namely, the personal convictions and ideals of one rebel named Gandl.

Yes, all his mutterings in his sleep, planted there by my suggestions, had been accepted. Those sleepy words had been just coherent enough to explain why the King was scattered all over the floor and why his hand bones clung to a dagger that the dead Firemaker wore in his heart.

But Gandl had had a most rude awakening from that bad dream. His bewilderment had prevented his saying much at first. Now, days later, the rumor was growing that Gandl privately denied his part in the affair.

"The King killed a Firemaker in defense of Gandl," the people would say. "But Gandl won't admit it. . . . He belittles himself. . . . He says he is not sure that the King ever gave him any messages. He always listened, as a King's Advisor should, but he is not sure he ever heard."

The rumors troubled many people, especially those who believed that Gandl had a chance to be King.

"The old King virtually placed the mantle upon him," they would argue. But for some reason Gandl still would not interest himself in promoting the traditions. The Firemakers were helpless. They wanted to condemn him for blasphemies, but they were afraid.

As for Gandl, his chief interest in life was to gather a little cluster of interested listeners around him and tell them about the outside world.

"There are many lands full of friendly people. There is sunshine half the time. There are no enemies waiting above our stairs. That is a myth that has been handed down by our forefathers from thousands of years back.

"The age of ice was upon our part of the world in those days. And our forefathers took refuge in the ice caverns to escape a hostile people.

"But that was long, long ago. The ice has moved away from those continents. It moved slowly, and we—our frightened forefathers—moved with it. And so here we are today, hundreds of generations later, still living underneath the ice and still afraid of enemies who forgot about us two hundred centuries ago."

IT was an impassioned appeal to face facts. It stirred the sluggish imaginations of many people.

One group after another would follow Gandl to the hallway where the row of dots had been cut in the wall like an endless border. Yes, they understood. Those dots represented years. The trail of time written there could be followed backward into past centuries.

And many would accompany Gandl on his tours into the remotest ends of the cave. There they would see ruins of the fine masonry and the engineering feats which had once protected their race against falling ice. It was plain that their entrance into this land was a well marked trail from the southward.

"Gandl is right, I am convinced," Professor Peterson would say. "The main stem of this race has come up from a temperate zone under the cover of ice. The occasional newcomers from the outside world—like ourselves—have given impetus to their arts of speech and use of tools."

But all of this was too baffling for most of the people. It called for too much thought and imagination and was hard to digest. And it made Gandl more than ever a subject of controversy.

However, Gandl was not seeking popularity. He was after the truth. He was much more eager to establish facts than to establish himself as King.

A new king was soon to be chosen. The air was full of rumors. But the days went by and no choice was announced.

I lost all track of time. But I knew it could not be long, now, until the ocean ice would start breaking and the *Aurora* would start back.

Lord Lorruth and Steve were continuing to make trips up to the surface, to convey sled-loads of the Lord's stored furs to Lady Lorruth. I wondered if her heart would thaw toward her husband—

"She has never found out he's still alive," Steve told me. "We take the precaution to get away before she or the captain spot us. But one day we bumped into Reuben Frabbel, and he told us she still has hopes of landing the captain's fortune—though he is usually too drunk to realize."

Steve and I were interrupted by a pair of messenger boys.

"Queen sends word to Pound. She let you take tiger sometimes to help carry furs. She wants see you."

"Me?" I asked hopefully. But no such luck.

"She wants see Pound."

I returned to my painting, and Steve went for a private interview with Veeva.

I was getting used to this. Various persons, including Shorty, Peterson, Lord Lorruth, Gandl, and the friendlier Firemakers, had been called aside by the Queen for interviews. I had been ignored.

Well, perhaps I shouldn't put it that strong. Veeva had dropped by to see me a few times, but she had never paged me to come to her throne.

I WHILED away my time painting many scenes and portraits. She had provided me with equipment, including certain bright luminous paints quite new to me. She had requested that I do portraits of several of her friends—a Firemaker, a workman, a young mother, a digger from the mines, a few boys. And she would frequently stop at my private studio cavern to see how I was progressing.

"You're keeping me busy," I said, "to keep me out of mischief."

"You enjoy painting, don't you?"

"More than anything except making love to a beautiful Queen."

"How long will it take you to get your fill of painting down here?"

"I'll run out of paint first," I replied.

A short time after that, I was paged to come to a ceremony in the Red Room.

I was ushered to the stairway in the presence of the thousands of spectators, and then and there I was made King.

CHAPTER XXVII

Lady Lucille Invades

IT WAS a coronation and a wedding ceremony, all in one, and I must say that I was more than a little amazed. My conduct throughout the occasion must have revealed my consternation. Afterward, Shorty told me he fully expected me to say, "This is so sudden!"

Well, it was sudden. For a Queen who was supposed to be twenty-two thousand years old it seemed like hurrying things up a bit not even to give her new King a five minute warning before the wedding.

As a matter of fact I would have delighted in a little wooing—a few moonlight tiger rides and such—if I had known I stood a chance with her.

After the ceremony I learned that our match had been virtually sealed from the moment that I saved her from the balcony fall and kissed her.

But to make sure that her emotions weren't running away with her twenty-two thousand year old judgment, she had called in her various friends—and mine—to ask their opinions of me. Steve, Shorty, and the others must have done well by me.

At first the natives had advised her that I was probably a fly-by-night outsider who would soon get homesick for my old world, and would desert.

"Consider the virtues of your former spouse," they had counselled. "How constant a partner he has been. In all these twenty-tow thousand years he has never once tried to leave you."

"Nor to love me," she had replied.

But as these natives had watched me paint and had observed the interest I found in their faces and their manners of living, they had revised their opinions.

And so I became the King. Not the *new* King or the *second* King—simply *the* King.

In the ceremony they assured me that I was twenty-two thousand and thirty years old, and that I would live forever. And, when I semed a trifle confused over what I had done with my twenty-two thousand years of forgotten youth, they assured me that I had slept

it away on an ornamental stone resting place.

Fortunately I remained scared enough through the ceremony to hold back my smiles. But it struck me funny to realize that that dusty old skeleton was *me*. That being the case, I had crowned that old Firemaker with my own thigh bone. The very thought gave me a catch in the side—or was it stitches?

"If you're gonna stay here and be King," Shorty said to me after the ceremony, "all I want is a job being janitor. I'll stick fer life just to be around you and your good lookin' wife—if she'll promise not to make me walk that white lap-dog of hers."

Steve and Professor Peterson were also quick to congratulate me on my success; Gandl was a good sport too.

But I was not at all confident that I possessed the qualities of leadership I would need to serve as King. Most of the knotty problems would fall to Veeva and the Firemakers, as per tradition. But I must be ready when troubles were dumped into my lap.

Trouble came one day in the spring and its name was Lady Lucille Lorruth.

WITH the Frabbel brothers and Captain French as her escorts, Lady Lucille made the perilous hike over the glacier to our caverns.

When I came upon her she was firing a revolver at Veeva in the Red Room. Her escorts had waited on the long stairway. Lady Lucille, white-faced and wild-eyed with madness, had come to wreak revenge.

Each shot from her unsteady hand caused Veeva to dodge or leap for cover. The Queen—my wife—was at the mercy of a mad murderess!

That was what I found as I rushed into the Red Room.

"Lady Lucille!" I cried. "Don't do it. Shoot at me, if you must. But not her."

Lady Lucille turned and gasped. "Jim McClurg! Come help me get my revenge!"

"I'll help. Give me the gun!" I shouted, running toward her.

In answer she aimed at me and fired twice. I was half a room away, luckily, and she was a bad shot.

The tiger bounded to Veeva's rescue in that moment, and the girl went riding straight toward this insane assailant.

"Don't!" I cried. "Don't go near—"

Veeva crossed like a streak of lightning, flashing her sword. Lady Lucille, tossing back her wild locks of streaked hair, aimed the pistol straight at her sworn enemy.

Snap. The gun was empty. *Snap . . . Snap . . . Snap . . .* Lady Lucille couldn't believe it. She was unprotected. The sword was coming. She screamed like nothing human.

Veeva flew past and gave a lightning-swift double stroke with her sharp weapon. Two wisps of hair jumped from the top of Lady Lucille's head.

Veeva spun around and raced back, twice, three times, four—and each time she took a deadly whack at her adversary's head, cropping the streaked hair closer, closer—

Lady Lucille emitted a blood-curdling moan and fell to the floor in a pitiful heap.

Veeva, panting but nevertheless laughing, looked down upon the vanquished foe. "Now do we understand each other? What could I do for you?"

Lady Lucille tried to defend herself by appealing to me. She tried to call Veeva a husband stealer and a vampire and a curse, who had demoralized the *Aurora's* crew and moreover had brought defeat upon Lord Lorruth and his party.

"You know I'm right, Jim McClurg."

Lady Lucille, still crouched on the floor, beseeched me to back up her charges. "This awful woman tried to steal my furs. And she has stolen my husband. He's hiding here. I know it. Reuben Frabbel told me. You'll admit it, won't you, Jim McClurg?"

"Lord Lorruth is here," I said, "but you can't see him. He doesn't owe you anything. He's given you the furs, out of the bigness of heart—"

"That awful girl—"

"Silence," I snapped. "That girl could teach you more loyalty than you've ever dreamed. She's been faithful for years to a husband who has given her nothing. Your husband has given you everything—everything but his life, and you've wanted that too, so you'll be free to marry another fortune!"

LADY LUCILLE'S eyes were wild with rage, her lips twisted, but her words wouldn't come. She was stunned to silence by my angry broadside.

I sent some boys up the stairs to get Captain French and the Frabbels to take care of her.

The captain was at a loss, he said, over her terrible outbursts. In this instance her fury had been aroused over one of the furs—a fur skirt which Veeva herself had once received as a gift from Lord Lorruth and had decided to discard—ornamental bells and all—in her effort to keep back nothing that Lady Lucille might claim.

The ornamental bells were a part of a set which Lord Lorruth had once purchased in Mexico, and their musical notes were identical in pitch. Some of them had been used on board the *Aurora,* and I remember that during my first sight of Veeva I had been struck by something familiar in the tinkling sounds of her ornaments.

For the present poor Lady Lorruth's fury was spent, and a sorry sight she was as the captain and the Frabbels led her away.

Within the hour Veeva sent Steve Pound forth with Whitey the tiger to help the party get back safely to the ship—for the spring twilight had not prevented heavy snows and bitter weather.

The wisps of hair—blue-black, with a streak of white—became trophies in Veeva's collections.

"If I ever start being jealous, Jim, just show them to me and I will be good," Veeva laughed.

"You will never have any reason to be jealous," I promised.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Kindling Wood

I MUST record an event of tragedy before I bring this story to a close.

I am glad that I did not witness it. And I am especially glad that Veeva was not on the scene when it occurred.

Steve came back to us a few days after he had departed to escort Lady Lorruth and the rest of the party back to the brig.

I had doubted whether he would return to us. I knew he wanted to. Shorty had decided to stay. Professor Peterson was sure there was plenty of research waiting to keep him busy for a few years—perhaps for most of his life.

And Steve, loyal pal that he was, had wanted to see our new regime get off to a good start, and Veeva had promised to make him a Firemaker for as many years as he cared to stay. Gandl had assured him that there would be other arctic explorers before many years, now that steamboats were coming in.

But Steve was second in command on the *Aurora,* and his duty was plain.

And so he had taken his final leave when he and Whitey went forth to accompany the party to the ship.

Whitey the tiger would of course return to us by himself.

As events turned out it was Steve who returned by himself.

"All the way back Lady Lorruth was like a frozen calm between storms," Steve related. "She rode the tiger with me because I made her. But I knew she was full of that devilish resentment. Now and then I'd drop her off and go back and help the others along. When we'd ride up to where she was waitin' she wouldn't seem to see us, and she wouldn't speak. She'd just watch the tiger.

"I got to wonderin' if there was a spot between its eyes or something, the way she'd always be gazin' there.

"Well, finally we plowed through the last mile of fog, so thick you could spread it like butter. The ice was breakin' and slidin' along with the current, and there were some big dangerous bergs amongst the floes. I saw we were all fixed to weigh anchor and heave away, and it was high time.

"But Whitey was still standin' there on the bank of ice, not knowing what to do. I was halfway up the ladder at the tailend of the party when I noticed. I went back and tried to make the tiger understand he was supposed to go home, and I pointed to the mountain ridge that you just could barely see through the thick mist.

"All at once she began shootin' at us —Lady Lucille—standin' up on the deck by herself. Had a rifle.

"By the time she'd shot four I could make out the captain runnin' down from the bridge yellin' at her to stop. But she fired another one and that did it."

STEVE POUND paused and drew a deep breath, and Shorty urged him to go on, tell us what. But Professor Peterson and Veeva both looked as if they'd already guessed it.

"I didn't *hear* that last shot," said Steve, "because the sound froze into the biggest ball of ice you can imagine. One second there was the brig with sails ready to hoist on both masts, and the next second there was that great big ball of ice ten times the size of the ship. And all at once it was spinnin' over, because the side that had formed flat against the ice and water was lighter.

"There was an awful roar and clatter of ice crashin' against ice, and I knew the brig and everybody on it were inside.

"Now it went floatin' down with the current—and then I turned to notice the awful thing that had happened to Whitey. One of the bullets had got him through the shoulders, and he was lyin' there in the snow, bleedin' and dyin'."

Steve paused.

"Go on, please," said Veeva in a low voice that was almost a whisper.

"It musta been that last bullet, I figure. It woulda jumped out ahead of the sound, all right. Otherwise it wouldn't have got through. Because that ice ball was an awful parcel of weight. You shoulda seen it when it crashed into that iceberg. That was one awful smash-up."

"What happened to the brig?" I asked. "It was built to stand a lot of pressure."

"It got battered into kindling wood," said Steve. "And it musta brought a sudden end to most everybody on board. I got a glimpse of Malonski floatin' along like a slab of ice. And I saw a few others. But no one but the captain pulled to shore alive. He was almost gone from a couple of terrible gashes, but he lasted for about five minutes.

"Kind of glad I had those five minutes with him," Steve went on. "You see he'd managed to get to shore with someone in his arms. Yep, she was dead, and she was a pitiful lookin' thing, but it gave him kind of a last glow of pride, havin' me know he'd tried. But he figures that she didn't know. She was too near gone from the minute the ship went over.

"Well, that's it," said Steve, "and as soon as I get warmed up a bit I'll take a shovel and go back—"

"I'll take care of that," said Lord Lorruth quietly. And Gandl volunteered that he would get some boys and sleds and go along.

Poor Lady Lorruth. I often think of her and what a life of torture she made for herself. And when I get to thinking I always try to patch things up in a daydreamy sort of way. If I had just made more effort to show her that she was on the wrong track—

If some of us had understood her and helped her to talk out her troubles—

If—if—if—

If only we had somehow managed to bring her and Lord Lorruth together to help them patch up their difficulties—

But Steve Pound said he had tried that with all his might. Lord Lorruth was stubbornly determined not to visit with her. He had no intention of ever going back to her. And for five years past he had told himself that if she should ever sail north to find him he would hide.

For Lord Lorruth was afraid of Lady Lucille, and Steve guessed there had been some narrow escapes from murder before this last fur-trading expedition.

And yet for all her faults and her madness, Lady Lucille Lorruth had had a share in overturning the lives of several of us. Unintentionally, perhaps, but none the less true.

THE more years I spend in this strange sub-glacial world, the more I hope I live to be twenty thousand or so. That's the influence of Veeva and her traditions. Being King isn't a half-bad job when there's a beautiful Queen like Veeva.

Do I ever get homesick for the far-away world of tall buildings and rushing traffic and bright lights? Well, perhaps I do. Perhaps I'll send this account of my adventure back to the United States someday, just to keep contact with the busy surface world I used to know.

And if this should ever be printed, and should chance to be read by any of you who are contemplating a voyage into the Arctic, it carries an invitation to you to come down under the ice and see us.

Professor Peterson will have the world's most interesting lectures ready for you. And you'll want to get acquainted with Shorty and Steve and Lord Lorruth. You'll want to visit Gandl, if he isn't off on a jaunt to Newfoundland or New York.

You'll want to meet Veeva, bless her heart, and all the family, bless their little hearts, and—well, anyhow drop in.

THE END

ALUBRO-WELD

THE Willson Optical Research Laboratories recently developed a blue glass called Alubro-Weld, compounded to filter out injurious rays of light in conditions of excessive glare. It is now being used in welder's lenses specifically recommended for aluminum and bronze welding. The lenses are also suitable for use in other occupations where a sodium yellow glare is encountered.

It is claimed that aluminum and bronze welders can see their work much better through the Alubro-Weld lenses and thus the flow of metal onto the weld can be more accurately controlled.

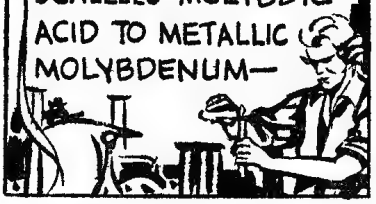
ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS—Molybdenum



MOLYBDENUM WAS ACTUALLY DISCOVERED IN AN ANCIENT JAP SWORD BLADE DATING BACK TO 1330; YET THE METAL WENT UNEXPLOITED UNTIL THE 1890's! AS LATE AS 1892, STEEL MAKERS FAILED IN AN ATTEMPT TO CUT DOWN ON TUNGSTEN IN TOOL STEEL, TO EMPLOY MOLYBDENUM INSTEAD. THE MOLYBDENUM THEY USED, IT SEEMS, CONTAINED TOO MUCH PHOSPHORUS AND SULPHUR!

THE GREEKS HAD A NAME FOR LEAD...

...THEY CALLED IT **MOLYBDAENA!** THE NAME LATER DESIGNATED LEAD SULPHIDE; THEN GRAPHITE AND MOLYBDENUM SULPHIDE. FOLKS CONSIDERED THESE TWO IDENTICAL UNTIL SCHEELE DISPROVED THE NOTION IN 1778. LATER HJELM REDUCED SCHEELE'S MOLYBDIC ACID TO METALLIC MOLYBDENUM—





GERMANY, LACKING TUNGSTEN DURING WORLD WAR I, SUBSTITUTED NORWEGIAN MOLYBDENUM IN STEEL. IN WORLD WAR II, THE ALLIES, CUT OFF FROM SOME FAR EASTERN TUNGSTEN SOURCES, FIND MOLYBDENUM ALLOYS EXCELLENT FOR ENGINE BLOCKS, GUN BARRELS, PROJECTILES, TURBINES, MACHINE TOOLS! GERMANY'S HEADACHE IS THAT OVER 90% OF THE WORLD SUPPLY IS AMERICAN-MINED!

MOLYBDENUM IN JEWELRY? **CERTAINLY!** IT'S LUSTROUS AND TARNISH FREE—LOOKS A LOT LIKE PLATINUM. THEY'RE USING MOLYBDENUM IN X-RAY APPARATUS, IN ARC LAMP ELECTRODES, IN WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY. IT APPEARS EVEN TO HAVE BEEN USED ONCE TO MAKE JAPANESE SMOKELESS POWDER!



MOLYBDENUM is number 42 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Mo, and its atomic weight is 96.0. It is a silvery white metal, softer than steel and quite malleable. Its melting point is very high, probably 2,500° C. Varying figures, 9.01; 8.95; 10.28; are given for the density of the pure metal. It is used in X-ray apparatus, lamp filaments, for permanent magnets, automobile parts, agricultural implements, railway forgings and track bolts; 1% alloy being sufficient for the purpose in most cases. Such alloys are rustless under ordinary weather conditions.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Nickel



"Certainly I'm a mermaid!" She flipped her tail to prove it



Freddie Funk's Madcap Mermaid

by LEROY YERXA

Neptune, enraged over the antics of the mermaid, Aquanis, dumped her in Freddie Funk's bathtub—and his troubles began!

NEPTUNE, son of Satura and conspirator against Jupiter, smashed his trident angrily in the sea bottom and cursed. His chariot halted and the graceful dolphins that drew it toward the courts drifted idly in the green water.

"Damn it!"

"Nep" shouted so loud that the dolphins jerked in their harnesses and he sat down again ungracefully. He howled louder and with great emotion. "Damn it, Strider, I told you to get rid of that girl, Aquanis."

Strider, dwarfish court attache, wriggled a fin nervously, and stuttered in a manner so befitting one of a low position.

"I'm—I'm so sorry, your majesty. But this girl, Aquanis, is—well—I'm afraid she's out of control."

Neptune's statuesque body stiffened.

"By the gods, man," he howled and almost fell over, "for a month this greentailed wench has made eyes at every young man in my navy. Now she must go, and if you can't do the job, I'll handle it myself."

"But—your majesty!" Strider squirmed on his fish half and looked miserable. "Aquanis is a most lovely young lady. It would be a mistake to do away with such beatuy."

Neptune considered the angles for a moment and then a salty grin split his lips.

"We won't have to kill her," he said slowly. "We'll pawn her off on an Earthling for a while. I never did like those weak sailers of ships. Perhaps a touch of Aquanis' deviltry will put salt in their brine. Maybe she is just what some Earthling needs to give him an appreciation for the better . . ."

"But how?" Strider, almost groveling before the master now, hoped *he* wouldn't figure in the task of disposing of Aquanis.

If the truth were known, he, like most other men in Neptune's green sea kingdom, had fallen head over fin in love with the gorgeous little court hussy. Her floating bronze hair, lake blue eyes, and pouting coral lips had him on his ear, or tail, most of the time.

Neptune laughed. It was a booming, deep laugh that sent a school of small sea creatures scurrying from under the green coral that shelved his city.

"How? I'll take her to Earth myself. I haven't been up since the World's Fair and that fountain in Grant Park is the 'nuts.' Verily! Chicago is the place. Aquanis will fit in well there."

He jerked the long thongs in his hand and the dolphin team darted forward again, thrashing the sea wildly in an effort to please their speed loving god, Neptune.

FREDDIE FUNK rounded the corner at Michigan Avenue on all sixteen and whistling loudly, approached the gay splash of paintings along the outer wall that bordered Wacker Drive. Freddie Funk was happy this sunny spring morning. The outdoor art show brought in a few extra greenbacks and his pocketbook had been empty for a long time.

Still whistling badly off key, he found an empty spot against the sun splashed wall, opened his folder of paintings, and arranged them carefully around the stall. He stepped back a few feet, tipped his curly thatched head to one side and examined the display with approving gray eyes.

"Pretty bad, aren't they, son?"

Freddie Funk turned grimly and found himself staring into the eyes of a strong old man with a thick, weedy looking beard. He framed a scorching reply.

"If you're referring to my work . . .?"

He hesitated and his mouth dropped open widely. The hefty old character had a booth next to his own. But the paintings! There must have been two dozen of them. The most beautiful reproductions of undersea life he had ever seen.

"Golly!" His eyes narrowed slightly with respect. "You've done some fine work."

The old gent stood up and made a low sweeping bow.

"I do only my humble best," he said. "Just the scenes that are most familiar to me."

Freddie Funk had forgotten his own smelly collection of alley paintings.

"Familiar?" *There was something strangely familiar about the old man himself.* The tough-hided face, rope-like hair, green eyes that looked straight through Freddie, gave him that feeling that he was drowning in them.

"I'd say you'd have to be a fish to get paintings like those."

Green eyes smiled and bent over his small box of paints and art material. When he straightened again, he held a long drawing pencil toward Freddie with a promising gesture.

"Here," he said wryly, "try it, and you might be surprised."

Freddie Funk took the pencil gravely. Bending to look for its hidden qualities, he felt a sudden gust of wind from the river. Was it his imagination, or did water hit his face in a salty mist?

His head jerked upward and eyes spilled open in surprise. Green Eyes had vanished—vamoosed. Gone as though the river had reached over the wall and swallowed him into it.

The paintings were still there, but Lord, what a change. He stared at them in disbelief. Where before there had been fine-colored fish and undersea fauna, now he found only ugly green streaks running up and down the canvasses.

Completely unnerved by the trying experience Freddie Funk arose hurriedly, gathered his belongings, and beat a hasty retreat to the Avenue. This time he did not whistle. A look of fright that could only be eclipsed by a glimpse of death itself, had settled in grey lines across his handsome face. Freddie Funk's long legs carried him with surprising haste toward the apartment studio on Wabash. In his right hand he still clutched the drawing pencil that Green Eyes had thrust toward him.

TRY as he might, Freddie could not throw from his mind memories of the strange afternoon. He still toyed with the thoughts of the old man's familiarity. Sitting before the drawing board, he picked up the drawing pencil that had been bequeathed him by the stranger. He made a few experimental lines across a clean sheet of paper. The point moved slowly. *In fact it moved of its own accord.*

He felt a force exercising itself as the lead traveled in delicate lines and circles against the paper's clean surface. This pencil was drawing something without his help. He held on tightly and let it work.

No one, Freddie thought, could ever buy a sketching pencil like this one. He watched with pretended disinterest as the point switched about under his fingers. Slowly a face appeared. Then a lovely neck and a smooth sheen of long hair. He blushed and felt that he should hide his head as the upper part of the girl came out on the paper. A slim shaded mid-section that was calculated to start tears of emotion in the eyes of the strongest male.

Two perfect unveiled breasts appeared. They left so little to the imagination that for the first time in his artistic life, Freddie Funk shivered with anticipation at the work on his drawing board.

But the pencil wasn't finished. It dipped down and started to draw the lower portion of the dream girl. This time the blush turned to a frown. An expression of distrust and faint disappointment worried Freddie's forehead. The completed drawing was before him. The pencil seemed to relax and wilt a bit in his sweaty fingers. It had completed a picture of the most perfect mermaid his mind had ever conceived.

He sat back quietly admiring the work. He tried to believe that this girl was from his own mind. It was no use. Why not admit it? She had all the wild abandon and perfection that had been given to the paintings Green Eyes had exhibited on Wacker Drive.

Freddie Funk sighed. He uttered the wish of any strong man. The thing that Neptune had planned on. Looking straight into the paper eyes of the mermaid he said lustily,

"I'd give up a square meal any day to have a look at the real product. Golly, but I wish she were real!"

S-P-L-A-S-H!!

STARTLED, Freddie jumped to his feet. Stumbling over his chair, he sprawled full length across the carpet. He lay very still.

There was a loud gurgle of water

from the bath adjoining his room. Then little human sounds of excited bewilderment. Sitting up cautiously, Freddie tried to bring his wits into a compact working group.

He stood up slowly and sidled toward the bath. At the door he hesitated.

There was a girl in Freddie Funk's bathtub.

He pushed the door open a little more and peeked in with all the terrible guilt in his soul bursting up in masculine curiosity. It wasn't a nice thing to do, but she had no business being there in the first place.

There she sat in the tub, water around her waist. Her eyes were green in a gentle sort of way that at once made it his favorite color. Her skin was as white and pure as milk. Her hair, like burnished copper, swept down about her shoulders until she was almost hidden beneath it.

"H'lo," she said, and two rows of sparkling teeth flashed between red lips. "Come on in. The water's fine."

She shook her head and the silken hair fell away, taking his breath from him.

"How . . .?" He stammered and stopped again abruptly.

"Don't stand there like a blue-nosed shark," she cried in mock anger. "Can't you see I need a towel?"

She did, but definitely. Round firm hillocks of marble had only partly retreated behind her drifting hair. Trying not to stare, Freddie retrieved a towel from the hook and tossed it to her.

"How did you get in here?" He tried to tone his voice at an angry level. "If the landlady finds out . . ."

She laughed mockingly.

"You wished for me," she reminded him, and retreated into the folds of the big bath towel. "Are you disappointed?"

Freddie Funk remembered the drawing. Then the lower half of her must be fish! His brain started to whirl.

"Are you—you . . .?"

"A mermaid?" She winked solemnly. "Well, there's one way of finding out."

He blushed furiously and stared at the soapy veil of water that hid her body from the waist down.

"Look, I'm just a nice young guy trying to figure things out. Don't get me wrong."

"Then I'll just have to show you myself." A devilish little grin parted her lips.

A spray of water hit Freddie Funk squarely in the face, and he saw a green scaly tail flip in abandon as she flopped it above the water.

He turned pale. "Don't ever do that again," he begged.

"Then will you believe I'm a mermaid?"

"BUT how . . . ?" He sat down weakly on the dressing table chair beside the tub, and dried his face. "I mean—well—things like this just don't happen."

"My, aren't you the funny person!" He had a strange feeling that she was laughing at him. "Well, it's like this. My name is Aquanis. It seems that Neptune is getting too old. He can't stand the sight of a pretty young thing twisting his navy around her fingers. He decided to send me here where someone can appreciate my beauty, and at the same time his navy can be rid of temptation."

She wriggled her shoulders enticingly and leaned toward him.

"So," Freddie scowled, "without considering the complications that might arise from setting a mermaid down in the middle of my bathtub, he pawned you off on me."

Aquanis started to weep softly.

"Oh dear! No one seems to want me

around. Don't you think I'm beautiful?"

She started to draw the towel away from her shoulders.

"No! Don't, please! You're too *darn* nice, that's the trouble." In his anxiety for her feelings, he stood up and patted her comfortingly on the back. Little bumps of gooseflesh came up on his arm from the warmth of the contact, and he stopped hastily. "Now everything's all right. Just don't cry."

She brushed a small hand over her eyes to wipe away the last tear. The sun came through again.

"Then you do like me?" she pouted.

"Like you!" He grinned. "Kid, you're all right. And now how long since breakfast? You must be getting hungry."

"I could stand a bite," Aquanis admitted. "Can you get fresh ones around this strange place?"

His chin dropped.

"Fresh what?" He knew with a terrible certainty what the answer would be.

"Why silly! Fresh fish, of course! I could just eat my tummy full of tiny fresh sea horses right this minute."

Freddie Funk turned his head away, collected his scattered brain cells and asked:

"Would raw perch do?"

"I never tasted them," Aquanis admitted. "They might be good."

He gulped hurriedly and retreated to the door, then turned toward her with a sickly smile.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," he said. "Anything else?"

"Oh, yes!" she fairly squealed in anticipation. "After my tummy's full, I want to go everywhere and find out what kind of a city this is. Nep says it's quite a 'joint,' whatever he means by that."

Freddie left the apartment hurriedly. The fish store down the street was still open. Feeding the mermaid Aquanis was only the beginning of his problems.

Freddie Funk's mind was functioning with remarkable clarity when he returned to the apartment. Aquanis had made herself at home in the tub, and was stretched out glamorously in a pose that would have made Homer himself follow Ulysses over the brink in search of the mermaids.

FREDDIE FUNK went on a shopping tour at Marshall Field's. He had been fortunate enough to sell a very prosaic painting to an unsuspecting art collector. He was also unwise enough to tell Aquanis of his luck. At her bidding, he was humbly following a chic little clerk through a blush-building array of feminine apparel.

"A long evening gown," he heard himself muttering. "Red, and very long, if you please."

When it arrived, he snatched it up hurriedly and paid the price.

"And did you wish anything else?" The feminine creature that hovered over him made the misery worse.

"Just—well, if you can give me one of those—those things . . ." He made a subtle little twin motion with his hands, trying to think just what size Aquanis might take.

The clerk nodded understandingly.

"What size does your wife take?" She said *wife* in a tone that made him feel like hiding in the woodwork.

He muttered something vaguely under his breath, pointed to a silky wisp that hung from a counter, and packed it quickly out of sight in his pocket. With a heavy, curiously thumping heart, Freddie started for home.

Aquanis had combed her hair out into flashing sunlight while he was gone. He tossed the packages across the threshold and closed the door hurriedly as she

cried out in delight. He could hear interesting little giggles as she wriggled into the new luxuries.

"Does the—er—thing-a-ma-jig fit?" He tried to sound casual. Aquanis giggled again, then laughed a low pleased laugh.

"You'll be surprised," she answered. "Come in."

She was seated on the small chair as he opened the door. The long crimson gown covered every last inch of those embarrassing fins and scales. Hair fell about her shoulders crowning a face more lovely than he had ever seen.

Freddie gulped.

"You're lovely! Almost as though . . ."

She bit her lip and smiled dimly.

Freddie crossed the room in a stride and picked her up in his arms. Aquanis cuddled her head against his shoulder happily.

"You *do* like me?" she asked in a worried voice.

Something like a shiver passed through Freddie, and he carried her into the studio.

"You poor kid," he said. "We're going to have a good time even if . . ."

"Even if I'm not like other people." She tried hard not to cry.

"Even if everyone in town wonders why I have to carry you everywhere I go. I sort of like it."

AQUANIS was startled by the lights on State Street. She wondered with wide green eyes at the size and beauty of the city. At the Chez Paree and the Ivanhoe Freddie tried to carry her around as casually as possible, only to find himself the object of much curious attention from other patrons. Although others were startled at this sleek young man who carried his lady in red like a knight of old, they soon forgot and stared with envy at the little mermaid with the hidden rudder.

At one o'clock he broke down under the load and sat her down in Grant Park beside the great colored fountain. For a long time Aquanis snuggled close to him, her lips buried against his neck. Freddie Funk had forgotten she was a mermaid. The night was very warm. Aquanis suddenly felt confined and uncomfortable in the folds of the gown.

"I'm going swimming," she announced calmly.

Freddie stiffened in fright.

"Oh, no!" he said. "You really shouldn't."

"The fountain is so pretty," she said, and pouted. "If anyone comes by, I'll just sit still and they'll think I'm part of it."

Freddie thought of the slim body under the thing-a-ma-jig, and shook his head.

"You don't know much about Chicago," he said.

She started to wriggle away from him.

"I'll scream, and when someone hears me, I'll flip up my gown and show 'em I'm a fish."

Freddie considered the problem carefully.

"You're a devil," he said grimly. "But if you must, all right. Please duck under if someone comes too close."

"I promise." She wriggled out of the warm clothing and flipped into the water.

"Oooh!" she said, letting it cover her shoulders. "It feels good. Come on in."

Freddie shivered at the thought.

"No thanks," he said. "I'd rather not."

"Kill joy!"

"Nope. I want to sleep in my own bed tonight. Never did like the jail."

Aquanis stretched out in the warm water and leaned her elbows on the side

of the pool. She put her lovely head against her hands and looked at him questioningly.

"All these other girls we saw tonight," she said thoughtfully. "Do you like them?"

"They're nice," he agreed. "Just so—so."

"Gee," she sighed, "I wish I were like them. You'd like me then, wouldn't you?"

"I like you . . ." His voice trailed off then, dropped into his shoes. Heavy footsteps burst from the bushes beside the walk.

"SO!" THE blue uniform howled, swinging his night stick threateningly. "Caught you, didn't I?"

"Caught who?" It was Aquanis, her silvery voice filled with curiosity.

"Just what I thought," the policeman bellowed. "A lady in the fountain. Come out of there, Miss, before I come in after you."

He pushed Freddie aside roughly and approached the pool's edge. Aquanis sat up, her soaked hair leaving little but a lack of modesty to clothe her.

"The water's nice," she said. "Please come in."

The policeman gulped and turned away, not too hurriedly.

"Sure and I'll give you just one minute to come out of there. Just one minute." Under his breath he added "A naked woman in the pool, is it, O'Shannagon? Did you have too much beer this night?"

A brilliant thought was collecting in Freddie Funk's mind. He could smell the faint aroma of ale wafting to him from O'Shannagon's lips. Hoping that Aquanis would be clever enough to catch his plan, he turned upon the bewildered policeman.

"Officer," he announced solemnly, "I believe you've been drinking."

"Young man!" O'Shannagon said, and burped loudly.

"What did I tell you?" Freddie turned to Aquanis, winking slyly. "I'll bet he even thinks you're a girl."

She grinned.

"Silly," she said. "He's just drunk enough to think I'm a fish."

O'Shannagon had suffered enough, and turned on them furiously.

"I'm running ye both in," he roared.

Then his eyes popped wide open, closed tightly in disbelief, and opened again reluctantly. Those two beers had sure done some funny things. The girl in the water had flipped the lower part of her body above the shallow water. He stared aghast at a long green tail, complete with scales and fins.

"Sure and I'm seein' mermaids," he moaned. "By the Shade of Saint Patrick, I *am* drunk." The night stick dropped from his limp hand. He twisted on his heel and rushed away across the lawn.

IT WASN'T with too gentle a touch that Freddie Funk assisted his mermaid sweetheart from the water fountain. He stood guard by the clump of bushes that bordered the walk, while with some difficulty she again donned the evening gown and other flimsy essentials. There was a certain amount of forgiveness in Freddie Funk's heart as he carried her back across the park with the burnished hair drifting down around his shaking shoulders.

He hailed a cab and they were soon back at the studio. Locking the door quickly he breathed a sigh of relief. For the time being they were safe from O'Shannagon and his ilk.

With Aquanis once again installed in her porcelain throne, Freddie sat down just outside the bathroom door. All the problems of the world were

on his shoulders. He knew from the splashing water and gurgling laughter that Aquanis was once more enjoying her almost perpetual bath.

This was a hell of a predicament. He couldn't go around the rest of his life carrying her in his arms. Suspicions were bound to arise on all sides after the novelty had worn off. Horrible visions arose in Freddie Funk's mind. He dreamed of the day when through some crazy trick of fate he might slip on a banana peel and unveil the whole horrible secret. The fish peddler was already growing suspicious of Freddie's insatiable appetite for fish. Desperately he stood up and started to pace the floor. The sounds in the bathroom had quieted and he wondered for a moment if she were still there.

"Aquanis," he called softly. No answer. He went to the door and listened. She was sobbing pitifully. He turned away, and with heavy shoulders and a drooping heart, walked to the drawing board. For the first time he realized that he was in love with a red-head mermaid. He sank down in the chair and brushed something akin to a crocodile tear from his eye.

Suddenly the sad droopy look on his face brightened and his shoulders straightened. There on the drawing board before his eager eyes was the same beautiful drawing of Aquanis that he had created with the magic pencil. The same image that had brought the girl living and breathing into his bachelor domain. More than that, the magic pencil was still lying on the table where he had cast it aside after being startled by that first embryonic splash from the bathroom.

Why, if he had created this gorgeous creature with a few simple lines of a pencil, couldn't he return her to Neptune by erasing what he had drawn?

A LUMP gathered in his throat and stuck there. No amount of gulping would wash it away. To send her back now would be a little less than murder. Most terrible yet, murder of someone he had learned to love dearly.

"Aquanis," he called softly.

This time she heard him and the sobbing stopped.

"Yes," she answered in a very quivery little voice.

"You're not very happy here, are you?"

"Oh, darn it!" Her voice was filled with returning spirit. "The top half of me is delirious with joy, but the bottom half seems—so—unnecessary."

Freddie's brain was thinking over an idea that would put modern science to shame. His brow clouded and little furrows of mistrust dug their way across his forehead. "Well, maybe . . ."

"Listen, kid," he shouted. "Are you game to try something?"

The voice that came back through the door sounded anything but game.

"Just—just so long as you don't send me away."

He picked the pencil up hurriedly and said in a not too confident voice.

"Tell me if it hurts."

Leaning over the drawing board, he erased just the tiniest section of her tail fin. A loud cry of surprise came from the tub.

"Oooh!"

"Did it hurt?"

Aquanis giggled. Evidently she was still hidden under the water and had experienced some queer emotion that startled her but brought no pain. Beads of perspiration popped out on Freddie's cheeks. With quick little jerking motions of his arm, he erased the entire lower part of her fish body, and left only the lovely head and undulating smoothness of her upper half on the paper.

A scream of protest came from the bathroom. "Oh my goodness, Freddie," in a voice filled with bewilderment, "there's only half of me here."

He couldn't stop now.

"Just sit tight," he shouted hoarsely, "everything is going to be all right."

Now she was laughing at him.

"But how can I sit?" she cooed sarcastically. "There's nothing to sit on."

FORTUNATELY for Freddie, and more fortunate for Aquanis, Freddie Funk had studied well the more subtle proportions of the human body. With his head close to the drawing board, he sketched below the already completed part of her body, a pair of long graceful legs attached to rounding hips that were almost beautiful enough to sway even on canvas. Dexterously, he completed a newer and much more enticing Aquanis. A perfect creature, much more suited to the life of sidewalks and Chicago night life.

Before he looked up from the board, Freddie knew the penciled operation had been a complete success. Little squeals of laughter and the sound of wet pattering feet on the floor beyond the door told him that his happiness would soon be complete.

He dropped the pencil, rushed to the door and threw it open. A startled cry fell from the girl's lips.

"Freddie!"

He realized immediately that although she was very attractive, it would be more convenient right now if he could give her an extra pair of arms. The two which she had were busily and hopelessly attempting to conceal an entire consignment of newly acquired charms.

With a happy gulp, he blushed to the color of an over-ripe tomato, and stumbled back to the drawing board. Hastily he sketched the necessary clothing around his ex-mermaid's body.

"There!" he said. "Can you come out now?"

He turned momentarily to find her standing in the doorway blushing modestly under the new housecoat.

"What are you drawing now?" she asked.

He grinned happily. Aquanis tripped lightly across the room and leaned over his shoulders. Freddie Funk was sketching a flowing, satiny wedding gown, complete with lace veil, wedding ring and corsage.

RARE ACID LAB

THE Los Angeles campus of the University of California has greatly increased its production of rare amino acids because of the war, according to Dr. Max Dunn, associate professor of chemistry.

With the assistance of M. J. Stoddard, Dr. Dunn operates a non-profit company, Amino Acids Manufacture, on the Los Angeles campus. The company is one of the three organizations of its type in the United States. It was formed by Dr. Dunn in 1935 shortly after he first began his study and found that only a few of the 23 acids were produced. Since then he has been able to produce nearly all the acids, and he sells these to laboratories and medical clinics all over the world.

The chemist is familiar with amino acids as constituents of proteins, but in appearance they resemble bath salt crystals. They are manufactured from many substances such as human hair, glue, dried blood, dried cottage cheese, etc. Some of these acids are so hard to produce that they sell for $1,000 a pound—or about twice their weight in gold.

The acids which seldom occur free in nature, make up the protein of man's hair, skin and fingernails.

Amino acids are used for a number of purposes. One kind is used as a flavoring for soups and gravies and has a surprising meat-like taste. Other types of the acid are used in medicinal research on cancer, baldness, and muscular diseases. Amino acids are already used in treatments of such disorders as gastric ulcers and muscular ailments. The war has shut off all source of supply from abroad.

THE PERFECT

Mrs. O'Flaherty couldn't hang onto a husband. Then Herbie had an idea . . .

CRASH! The sound was that of our door bursting open. And I do mean bursting—the frosted glass panel already was tinkling to the floor in more pieces than our office had cobwebs and cigarette butts combined.

I jumped straight up to within a foot of the ceiling, bit two inches off the end of my tongue, and dropped the anti-shrapnel-and-bomb-splinter skull-cap on which I was working in my spare time. When our door opened that way, I didn't need to take a gander into a crystal ball to know that difficulties were in the offing for the Cupid's Bow Correspondence Bureau and its proprietors. If I had realized said difficulties' extent and repercussions, I'd have jumped out the window then and there.

Herbie McPhail, the other half of Cupid's Bow was deep in the usual big, time-blackened volume on necromancy; he fancies himself quite a sorcerer; and, come to think of it, not without cause. His long nose was giving



HUSBAND—

by
DWIGHT V.
SWAIN



"There's a body in the coffin," Herbie said. "Yours!"

the pages a rub-down any Swedish masseur would have envied, while his beady, close-set little eyes squinted myopically at the words through thick-lensed Harold Lloyd glasses.

Instinctively, at the crash, he banged the book shut. He did it so fast, unfortunately, that he forgot to straighten his half-pint carcass in time; Herbie's reflexes are like that—sort of curdled. So his bald-eagle proboscis was pinched between the pages when the tome snapped closed. Herbie promptly gave out with a war whoop that would have

done credit to his favorite banshee on Walpurgis Night.

I started to snicker—for I consider Herbie to be a thorough-going rat who would gladly sell his mother's soul for two bits—, then remembered the door and turned to see who was on our trail this trip. The same idea must have struck my misbegotten partner, because he cut off his wail in mid-breath and also ogled the entrant.

Together, we stared.

Trouble, personified, stood glowering there. Double trouble. The well-known eight-ball, alive and breathing.

"You scum!" grated Trouble, otherwise known as Mrs. Celestine O'Flaherty. "Riffraff! Robbers of widows and orphans!"

I swallowed hard in an unsuccessful effort to clear my throat. Pasted a sickly, greenish smile across my face.

"Lovely day, isn't it, Mrs. O'Flaherty?" I croaked.

The unlovely lady, brawny arms akimbo, turned the full force of her spleen on me.

"Look out the window!" she thundered in a voice like the granddaddy of all avalanches, at the same time pointing a finger comparable to a railroad spike at the pane.

CELESTINE O'FLAHERTY stands six feet one, weighs 230 pounds, and was the champion lady wrestler of the state before she settled down to farming.

I looked.

Solid sheets of rain beat against the glass.

"'Lovely weather'!" mocked Celestine, with all the sympathy and good nature of a hungry tiger on the prowl. "Outside, a cloudburst it is. The river's rising a foot an hour, and the south end of town already's under water. Me old home across the tracks just was wrecked by a hurricane. But you call it lovely weather!"

I shut up.

The O'Flaherty turned on Herbie.

"And you, ye squirming little rat!" she ground. "Why would you be trying to hide under that desk?"

"Now, now, Mrs. O'Flaherty!" Herbie jittered, scrambling back to his chair with a sheepish look on his ugly phizz. "Your *karma** will suffer for these outbursts."

"Leave my caramels out of it!"

There followed silence, gradually thickening to the general consistency of pancake batter. At last Herbie tried again.

"How are you today, Mrs. O'Flaherty? Are you and your new husband happy together?"

"'Happy'!" fumed Celestine. "How can we be happy together, when the slimy serpent ran out on me yesterday, and that barely two days after we was married?"

Deep within me, a crawling horror welled. Great circles gathered about my partner's eyes even as I watched.

"He . . . he ran out?" he finally managed.

"Yes, he ran out!" blasted our visitor. "Because I but ask the lazy lout to do a bit of plowing, he leaves me flat!"

"But . . . but—perhaps the work was too heavy—"

The indignant O'Flaherty glared.

"Did he think I was marrying him for to ornament me parlor?" she demanded violently. "By Saint Patrick, I wed to get me a man. A man who could be helping me on the farm! Besides"—she sniffed righteously—"the work ain't hard. All he had to do was hold the plow; I pulled it meself!"

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* *Karma* is a Hindu term referring to the effect on life after death of one's acts in this current existence.—ED.

"I'm terribly sorry, my dear," Herbie began. "But then, the ways of the Three Fates* are strange—"

"Fates, me eye!" raged the human hippo. "And you'd better be more than sorry. You took me money, and you guaranteed you'd find me a husband. Now, either you give me a man or me money—"

"But we've already gotten you four husbands, Mrs. O'Flaherty," I protested desperately. "We can't help it if they run away."

"You guaranteed satisfaction, didn't you? Well, I ain't satisfied."

"We'll certainly do our best to locate a new soul-mate for you—" Herbie began again.

THE Amazon glared from one to the other of us.

"You'd better do more than try," she asserted darkly. "Either I get a man, or you get trouble—"

"But there aren't any more of our clients who want to marry you," I broke in.

That was putting it mildly. We'd gotten her last husband from the soupline at the city mission.

"Then find some!" A moment's pause, heavy with ominous implications. "What about the two of you, scoundrels that you are? You're both bachelors, ain't you? Well—"

A shudder shook me like an obelisk in an earthquake. Across the room, Herbie's eyes bugged out with stark horror.

"I'll give you just 24 hours," Celestine went on grimly. "Find me a husband in 24 hours, or else!"

Mute, despairing, Herbie and I stared at each other.

"And if you've got any ideas of skipping out, me fine buckos, just bear in mind that Mike O'Flaherty is still me brother!" our loving client threw at us over her bull-like shoulder as she stomped out the door.

Mike O'Flaherty is the sergeant commanding the city police bunco squad. If there's anything he hates worse than con men, it's matrimonial bureaus. Further, he works hand in glove with the post office inspectors, who are the bane of our lives. If Celestine told Mike we'd gypped her, we'd have about half the chance of the proverbial snowball in hell.

Celestine's footsteps died away down the hall, but neither of us said anything. For my part, I was thinking too hard. And too dolefully.

Celestine O'Flaherty is, as I mentioned before, a former lady wrestler. And both her face and figure show it. Her general lines approximate the grace and symmetry of a concrete mixer, 1912 model. Her legs remind you of an Egyptian temple's pillars, and her head must have been hammered down between her shoulders with a pile driver. As for her face—well, the less said, the better. But I can mention that one ear is cauliflowered, while her nose resembles a misshapen mushroom crushed to earth.

All in all, hardly the type to attract suitors, especially since her disposition equalled that of an angry buzz-saw.

But Celestine couldn't see it, and she had a few dollars she'd saved from her wrestling days. When my money-grubbing little partner guaranteed to find her a man, she jumped at the idea.

Now we were stuck with her.

We were stuck because we couldn't find anyone who'd put up with her. Most of our clients ran after one glimpse of her ugly mug, of course. But finally we lined up a few prospects.

*The Three Fates are drawn from Greek mythology. They are represented as goddesses. Clotho spins life's thread, Lachesis decides its length, and Atropos cuts it off.—Ed.

She married them—one after another. On an average, each lasted around three days. After the second one, she didn't even bother to adopt their names; just called herself Mrs. Celestine O'Flaherty.

"WELL, I suppose there's nothing to do but start in hunting again," I said at last, rising from my chair. "Maybe we can find a sucker around the employment agencies down on Werner Street." I picked up the metal skullcap I'd been working on and tucked it away in my desk's top drawer.

"Yes, I suppose so," agreed Herbie sadly. A pause. Then: "You go ahead and try Werner Street. I'll see if there's anyone along the waterfront; three times, now, *Maman** Julie has told me the sea would aid me in time of need."

I stopped short.

"Oh, no, you don't!" I grated. "You're coming along with me. I don't intend to wear my feet out looking for a guy who's sap enough to marry even O'Flaherty, while you sit up here in the office reading a lot of trash on how to be a witch. Come on!"

"But I'm not going to stay here—"

"I believed that the first time I heard it," I retorted. "Now I know better. Just because this matrimonial bureau scheme was your idea in the first place, and because I was sucker enough to invest all my money in it, you've got a theory that all you should do is to loaf around here and grow fat on the profits, if any. Only this time it won't work."

"But Maman Julie is a real *Nebo*—" **

"Malarkey." I was disgruntled all the way through. "Do you think I'm dumb enough to let you hex yourself out of doing a little work for a change? If you want to mutter about your pet voodoo doll, do it after working hours. Now come on!"

So we left, with Herbie hating me to hell with his beady little eyes and mumbling about Maman Julie—an old Haitian woman who was supposed to be teaching him the higher secrets of sorcery, or something—between his teeth.

But our luck was played out.

We found the first stumble-bum down on Werner. I explained the proposition to him in words of one syllable.

"She's nuts about husbands," I concluded. "Anything that wears pants looks good to her. She'll give you a home—and what have you got to lose?"

The stiff eyed me skeptically.

"Wassername?"

"Celestine O'Flaherty. A fine, big, Irish woman—"

"Ha-ha-ha," laughed the rumpot; only it didn't sound a bit funny. "I seen dat dame rassle at de Olympic one time, chum. An' I ain't takin' no chances on de t'ings happenin' to me what dat guy got. Ha-ha-ha." He stalked away.

I MADE Herbie try the second stew. He tried to floss up the salestalk.

"How would you like to have a little home of your own, my good man?" he demanded. "A vine-covered cottage, with a pretty young wife and children playing in the dooryard?"

The loafer snorted.

"I already got one wife in Cleveland," he answered, spitting into the gutter for emphasis. "Dat's why I'm on de bum."

I started to turn away, but Herbie went right on talking.

* *Maman* is the term often applied to the *mamalois* (priestesses) of the Haitian voodooists.—ED.

** The "Papa Nebo" is the hermaphroditic oracle of the dead in the Haitian *culte des morts*, a secret witchcraft society which uses corpses for magical purposes.—ED.

"Splendid!" he beamed. "You're just the man we want! You've had experience, so you understand just how to make a woman happy. Now is your opportunity to bring joy into a lady's life and, at the same time, to help yourself economically."

The 'bo was suspicious.

"Who yuh want me tuh marry?"

"The young lady's name is Celestine O'Flaherty—"

"Den count me out!" The bum already was on his way. "I seen Klondyke Charlie de day after he teamed up wit' her. Not fer mine!"

And that was the way it was, all afternoon long. Every Wandering Willy on the stem knew just what we had to offer, and not one of them could be persuaded to chance it.

"Well, that's that!" I growled as we stalked back toward our disreputable office. "There's only one thing to do: refund the dame's money."

Herbie suddenly went jittery on me.

"We can't give a refund!" he declared, nodding his long nose for emphasis.

I turned on him.

"Why can't we?"

"Well . . . well, it would be bad for business. Cupid's Bow guarantees its work, of course, but if we ever gave a customer back his money, every divorce would mean a refund—"

"Nevertheless, this time we return the moola," I answered grimly. "It'd be bad enough to have to finish my anti-shrapnel skullcap in the pen, but I could stand it. But to have the O'Flaherty go to work on me—" I shuddered.

"But—but—"

"We hand back the dough," I reiterated firmly.

AND then, suddenly, an awful thought struck me. Herbie is treasurer of Cupid's Bow. What if—! I turned on him. Caught him by the coat lapels.

"Where is it?"

"Please, George! I—"

"*Where is it?*"

Herbie's beady eyes fell. He had the grace even to turn scarlet.

"I—I spent it, just the other day . . ."

"You spent it!"

"Maman Julie and I needed some new materials—"

"Then we'll take it out of your own pocket, you little rat!" It had been a long time since I was so angry. Ever since we'd teamed up, I'd suspected dirty work at the crossroads. Now, to find that all our money—mine included—was tied up in some tomfoolery of black magic, was just too much. "Dig down, you two-bit crook, and drag out that five bucks!"

Herbie squirmed.

"Why don't you marry her, George?" he asked desperately. "After all, Celestine has her good points. You might grow to love her—"

I shook him like a terrier shakes a rat.

"Just like you!" I fumed. "You'd send me to the altar as a burnt offering to save five lousy dollars. Well, you're not getting away with it—"

"But it isn't five dollars!" he exploded desperately.

"What do you mean?"

Herbie broke down completely.

"I told her she was a difficult case, and would take special service," he confessed. "I talked her out of a hundred dollars!"

"A hundred dollars!"

"Yes. And now it's all gone."

A terrific urge to wring my partner's neck swept over me. But somehow I restrained myself.

"How long has this special fee business been going on?" I ground, flick-

ing the foam from my mouth. "How many times have you pulled it?"

"Not many times, George—"

"How many?"

"Well . . . every one that I handled myself where I could get away with it . . ."

"No wonder Mike Flaherty and the bunco squad hate us!" I exploded. "No wonder I'm broke all the time, while you wallow in money! Oh, you—"

"Hi, boys!"

We both turned. It was Uncle Ike Ginsberg who had spoken. He stood across the street, in front of his three-ball loan emporium. Somehow I got the impression he was laughing at us.

"Hi!" I grated back.

"Just made a sale to a customer of yours," disclosed Uncle Ike.

"A customer of ours?"

"Yeah. Celestine O'Flaherty."

A SUDDEN sinking feeling gushed through me. A vampire tapping my veins at that moment would have gotten a swell drink of ice water.

"What'd she buy?" I croaked.

Uncle Ike laughed unpleasantly. I felt a quick conviction that he didn't like either of us.

"Just a pair of brass knuckles," he answered brightly. "I think she intends them for a present. A surprise, sort of. She said they were all for you!"

I turned back to Herbie.

"In parting, let me say it wasn't nice knowing you, Mr. McPhail," I told him. "I'd break your scrawny neck right now, except that I'm in a hurry."

"Huh?" gaped my erstwhile partner. "What are you going to do?"

"Me, I like peace and quiet," I retorted. "I'm joining the Commandos until Celestine gets over her mad."

"Aw, now, Georgie, you wouldn't run out, would you?" snarled a harsh voice close to my ear.

I jumped a foot into the air. When I came down I was facing Sergeant Mike O'Flaherty. Compared with him, his sister was a small, frail weakling.

"*I* wouldn't run out, if *I* was you," he went on. "I'd be afraid I'd get hurt. By one of these gents"—he jerked a thumb the size of a summer sausage over one shoulder toward two other huskies who trailed in his wake—"what are going to stick right close to your coat tails 'til Celestine's satisfied—*get it, you rat?"*

I quivered like a watery custard.

"Yes, sir. I understand, sir."

"O.K., then." And, to his men: "Stick with him, boys. If either him or his buddy slip you, you'd better get out of town, too."

It was dark in our shabby office now. Herbie was skittering about the room like a centipede with athlete's foot, while I tried to make myself concentrate on completing my anti-shrapnel skullcap. Given a little luck, I figured, the thing would make my fortune some day. I'd designed it to fit tight against a person's head, thus at one and the same time making it easier to wear than the usual helmet—you couldn't even tell you had it on most of the time—and saving huge quantities of metal. Yet special built-in recoil springs made it as much protection as the current clumsy style.

Herbie shot a nervous glance at the battered alarm clock on my desk for the hundredth time.

"Nine forty-seven!" he gulped. "Celestine will be back at one p. m. tomorrow. That only gives us fifteen hours."

"Shut up!" I flared. "Quit reminding me of it."

"But we've got to do something!" squealed Herbie. "If we don't raise the money or find her a husband, she'll—"

"A fat chance we've got of doing

either! We could sooner raise the dead than a hundred smackers!"

HERBIE stopped short. Sudden excitement gleamed in his beady little eyes.

"That's it!" he squawked.

I tightened the last screw in my helmet, tried it on. It fitted perfectly.

"What's 'it'?" I demanded sourly.

"We'll raise the dead!" my undersized rat of a partner jabbered excitedly. "We'll get that O'Flaherty woman a husband—"

My eyes bugged out. I stared at him in weird fascination.

"Nutty as a fruitcake!" I exploded. "So you've finally cracked!"

"No, no!" Herbie was bouncing like a golf ball with the heebie-jeebies. "Don't you see, George? Maman Julie is a Nebo! She can make a corpse into a zombie!* And they've been working zombies on plantations in Haiti for years! A zombie would make Celestine O'Flaherty a perfect husband—he'd work when she told him to, and he'd never answer back, and—"

My hair was as close to standing on end as my iron skullcap would allow.

"You sound as if you meant it!" I gasped.

"Of course I mean it—"

I grabbed my hat, slapped it on. Reached for my coat.

"Good-bye forever!" I announced. "I'm going outside and give myself up to those two bunco squad cops in the hall. At least, they can only shag me for a confidence rap. But if I stick around you, you're just crazy enough to line us up for the hot seat on a murder charge. And I'm not having any." I started for the door.

Herbie clutched at my sleeves like the persistent human leech he was.

"Don't go, George. Please don't!" he pleaded. "I need you. With Maman Julie to help us, we can put it over. And with no danger, either. I'll call her on the 'phone right now and get her to line up some stumblebum—"

"And I'll still take vanilla!" I grated, tearing my arm free. "Maybe you're cracked enough to believe all the necromantic nonsense you've been reading down through the years, but I still value my hide. I'll have no part of it!"

Herbie refused to listen. His eyes were sparkling with unholy enthusiasm.

"Even if those big bums in the hall follow us to Maman Julie's house, it won't matter!" he babbled on. "They won't know what's happened—"

"But there'll be a corpse on the parlor floor, and an accessory after the fact gets the same rap as the guy who uses the knife," I retorted grimly. "Besides, I've got no urge to spend the rest of the nights in my life lying awake thinking about the man we murdered."

"Then we won't murder anyone!" argued Herbie. "We'll have Maman Julie steal a corpse from the morgue. She can do it! They can't accuse us of murder that way."

I ALREADY was reaching for the doorknob. But at this last I stopped. Turned on Herbie.

"You mean it?" I demanded. "You actually think you and this Haitian ghoul can raise a corpse to life and make it pass for a husband?"

"Of course we can! Maman Julie has done it lots of times. The man will be pretty thick-witted, but that's what that O'Flaherty woman needs. All she has to do is to keep him on the right kind of diet—no salt or meat—and a zombie will be a perfect husband—"

* "The *zombie* . . . is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life . . . it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive." Seabrook: *The Magic Island*.—Ed.

Cold chills were using my spinal column for a race-track, and I had an idea my hair would turn out to be snow white when next I took my hat off, but I could feel myself slipping. After all, I certainly had no great urge to spend the next few years of my life in the state penitentiary, wearing off my youth's bloom on a rock pile. And if we didn't kill anyone, what could be done to us? After all, this wasn't Haiti . . .*

"You've got to do it, George" Herbie begged. "It's our one chance. You know no normal man would marry Celestine. You know we haven't a chance of raising the money. But a zombie—ah, that solves our problems!" A pause, while I stood gnawing my nails. Then, hesitantly, as if it hurt: "I'll even make up the deficit, George. I'll give you back the money I've . . . er . . . borrowed, just as soon as I can . . ."

That did it. It wouldn't have, of course, if I'd noticed the evil gleam in my erstwhile partner's eyes. But I didn't. All I could see was the chance to get in the clear, and maybe even to get some of my money back.

"I'll do it!"

Since the Cupid's Bow office wasn't equipped with a 'phone, we hurried across the street to Murphy's Bar, Mike O'Flaherty's two detectives close on our heels. Then, while I grappled with a couple of shots of rye, Herbie put through his call to Maman Julie. He was beaming from ear to ear when he came out of the booth.

"It's all set!" he whispered. "Maman Julie says she'll have everything ready to go by midnight."

"How about a body?"

"Talk about luck!" My partner was bubbling over with enthusiasm. "She says a roomer at one of her neighbors just died. No relatives known. They were glad to give her the body just to get rid of it."

I shuddered and put another slug of rye where it would do the most good.

A GOOD many more followed. My nerves were bad to start with, and Herbie's ghoulish giggles didn't help a bit. By the time midnight rolled around, my head was crawling with vampires, werewolves, elementals, *haugbuis,* and incubi—all charming creatures conjured up for me by my partner's gleeful tales of things supernatural.

"Come on!" he urged at last. "It's nearly the witching hour."

"You go ahead," I tried to stall, my teeth imitating a skeleton's rattlings. "I'll leave everything to you. Any way you work it is all right with me."

Herbie shook his head.

"You've got to be there," he explained in a low voice. "The rites require three people—the *Papa Nebo,* the *Gouede Mazacca,* and the *Gouede Oussou.*"

Together, we stumbled out of the bar. And close behind us came Mike O'Flaherty's men, matching us pace for pace.

Maman Julie's place was a shanty deep in the slums. Not a light showed anywhere within it. It was as black and uninviting as an open grave. But when Herbie knocked, the door swung open, revealing a hall so dark as to make the gloom-shrouded street down which we had come seem a place of

* Article 247 of the Republic of Haiti's *Code Penal* states: "Also shall be qualified as attempted murder the employment which may be made against any person of substances which, without causing actual death, produce a lethargic coma more or less prolonged. If, after the administration of such substances, the person has been buried, the act shall be considered murder no matter what result follows." Thus, Haiti attempts legal control of zombieism by assuming it to have a natural, rather than supernatural, basis—Ed.

light and cheer.

We entered. The door swung shut behind us. We stood tense and still in the pitch-blackness. I tried to swallow; it felt as if I were forcing down a billiard ball.

Another, inner, door opened.

"Enter!" chanted an unpleasant, high-pitched voice.

The room beyond the door was dimly illuminated, as if with a single candle. I couldn't quite locate the source of light. The chamber itself was bleak and bare, save where a crude altar rose at one side. Bones, human skulls included, were stacked upon it. A shovel and a pickaxe lay gruesomely ready. Unlighted black candles stood at each corner. In front of the altar, lying on the floor, was a coal-black coffin.

But all this was merely incidental. The center of interest was Maman Julie herself.

She was a black and wrinkled crone with eyes that gleamed like red coals. A bandanna shrouded her head; a shawl covered her thin shoulders. An aura of inexpressible evil surrounded her.

But it didn't seem to faze Herbie a bit. He rubbed his hands together briskly and beamed at the hag.

"Is everything ready?"

The witch nodded wordlessly.

I COULDN'T stand that tension any longer. My stomach felt like it needed a gyroscopic compass to enable it to make a landing. I had to do something.

So I walked across the room. Stared down into the coffin. The next instant I let out a wild squawk.

"Hey, there's no one here!" And, turning to Herbie: "Where's the body?"

"Your eyes must be going back on you, George." He stepped up beside me. "It's there. Right in the coffin. Look again."

The thought flashed through my brain: what if the strain had been too much for me? What if I was a customer for the batty wagon?

Again I stared down into the coffin. Still I could see nothing. Not even a maggot!

And then I caught a flicker of motion. But it wasn't in the coffin; it was behind me, and to one side!

Instinctively, I spun about.

"Sure, there's a body in the coffin!" chortled my dear partner Herbie. "Yours, you dope!"

Vainly, I tried to dodge. But I was too late. The gas-pipe in Herbie's hand smashed straight down on the crown of my head with enough force to stun an ox. . . .

* * *

YES, my anti-shrapnel skullcap was pretty badly dented by that wallop, but it certainly proved its effectiveness. The War Department contracted for a sample consignment just yesterday.

As for my partner, the rat—well, he certainly was right about zombies making perfect husbands for domineering women. Celestine O'Flaherty says Herbie is ideal!

WILD ANIMALS FIRST JAP VICTIMS

WHEN the Jap threat to invade Australia became a possibility, the first to suffer were greyhounds and dangerous circus and zoo animals. According to the Australian News and Information Bureau, owners of greyhounds had them destroyed by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Circuses and zoos were also compelled to destroy lions, tigers, and other animals that might be dangerous if they got loose during a Jap air raid.

The terror and destruction that one lion could produce among the defenseless civilian population if he got loose was anticipated and thus Leo and his family were mercifully killed.



He needed a drink; but it shouldn't have come from that bottle



The Man With Five Lives

By CLYDE WOODRUFF

When one personality gets split into five facets, even an editor has his hands full

TO THE READER:

Unusual as it may appear for a story to begin with an explanation, there is a reason for it. The reason, however, is so complicated that the author has little hope of it being understood at this point. He offers instead, temporarily, a simpler reason: this explanation was actually written after most of this story. But why, you may well ask, is it placed here? For one, as you will later discover, there seems to be no other suitable place for such a note. More important, it is meant to serve as a warning. For the following pages are not, in a strict sense, a work of fiction. Nor are they, truthfully, the truth. The best I can offer now is to say that my story is entirely true when viewed whole. *But only upon that condition! As a matter of fact, it is only because so much of it is untrue (though* all *of it is true) that it is here in print at all. I might add that it has been printed over my protests, a contention which, however much you may scoff at now, will become increasingly clear as you read. Be warned.*

*The Author**

IT BEGAN on the most memorable Friday evening of my life, though it seemed innocent enough at the time. I was at the Astor bar when a waiter said that Jenks wanted me on the phone. It burbled around in my head, making no sense, and I said to Mahoney, "How does Jenks know

* Pay no attention to the author's foreword.—Ed.

where I am? Invite him down here to have dinner with us."

A minute later, Mahoney shuffled back to the bar. He said to the bartender, "I'll have another Coca-Cola with an egg in it." There are few men who can ask for a thing like that and get away with it, but Mahoney is six feet of muscle, with a head like a buffalo.

"Is Jenks coming?" I asked.

"Wasn't nobody on the phone," Mahoney grunted.

I thought about it. As I said, this was a Friday, and generally when I'm entertaining over the weekend, I get to a bar early Friday afternoon and get into condition. I'd been at the bar since three and it was now six-thirty, and the world had assumed very fuzzy outlines. I thought about Mahoney's answer and I tried to remember what it was I had to remember about Jenks, but I got nowhere.

"Hey, Mahoney," I said, "doesn't it seem a bit strange—"

"No, boss. Nothing your jerk friends do seems strange."

It was a good answer, generally speaking, but it didn't really apply to Jenks. David Jenks was one of the few worthwhile guys I knew.

"Mahoney, how do you know there was no one on the phone?"

"Listen, boss, anytime I get on the phone and I say hello five—six times and nobody answers, I start thinking maybe nobody's there."

I had another drink. I tried to think about all the things I had to think about, and there were plenty, but I couldn't place it. I am a guy with enough troubles. "Mahoney," I said, "maybe there's a clue on this list of appointments. Would you mind reading it for me?"

Mahoney scowled at the memo pad I held out to him. "I told you a hundred times I can't read the butler's handwriting," he said. "He writes too damn fancy for me."

I said, "The valet wrote this."

"I'm crazy about him, too," Mahoney said, taking the pad. He read the list. *"Nine A.M.: canter through park.* Haw!" Mahoney sneered. "You fell outa bed at eleven. *Eleven A.M.: see Reverend Jasper for final arrangements."*

"What arrangements?"

Mahoney regarded me with distaste. "Boss, if that's why you're drinking, there ain't enough Scotch in the world to make you forget it. You're getting married at four o'clock, Sunday—remember? *Noon: lunch with Ray Vanness at the Algonquin.* You was an hour late," Mahoney said. "Vanness had had his lunch and left you the check. *One P.M.: see Riley, Riley and Shapiro about estate settlements.* You did that. *Two P.M.: see photographer from picture magazine—"*

"What picture magazine?"

"How do I know? I heard the butler telling the rest of your menagerie that some picture magazine wanted to photograph your wedding. So you missed the appointment. Still two P.M. *See editor of Daily Mirror, protest about item in Winchell.* Ain't that the one about you and a certain strip-teaser going steady?"

"Shut up," I sighed. "Anything there about Jenks?"

"There's a special note here under three o'clock. *No drinking, as per solemn oath to Miss Dykstra.* So you're drinking the joint dry."

"Stick your nose back into that egg," I said. "What's with—"

"Yeah, Jenks. It says here to be sure to read his telegram."

"Ah-h-h-h," I breathed, and something in my head went click! I heard it. "I'm beginning to remember. He said something about a great discovery

he had made. And he couldn't come to the wedding." From there it grew fuzzy again. "I called the laboratory a while back—"

"You didn't call nobody," Mahoney said. "You can't even move."

"Shut up," I said. "You were in the men's room. I called, but I can't remember who spoke to me. It was something about notes. . . ."

SUDDENLY everything began dancing before me. I grabbed hold of the bar and steadied myself. You know how things are sometimes when you've got something on your mind? Somebody says something and it doesn't begin to register until a long while later? That was what was happening to me—it was beginning to register!

"Mahoney!" I said. "Jenks' notes are missing!"

"Like for a breach of promise?"

"He said they were a military secret!"

Mahoney told me later that this last remark, hurled at the bartender, caused quite a stir. I ran out of the place with Mahoney behind me and grabbed a taxi. The laboratory was only half a mile away, but bucking midtown Manhattan traffic at seven o'clock, it took us twenty minutes to get to the East Thirties, and by then I remembered a lot.

You see, David Jenks was a sort of protege of mine. I mean, he had the brains and I had the money. We'd gone to college together, and in those days I had been interested in things. Things like psychological research, for instance; I majored in Psych with Jenks. He was serious, talented, brilliant, and after school—that was five years ago—when I had taken over my inheritance, which Riley, Riley and Shapiro are still estimating, though it seems to be somewhere between fourteen and fifteen million, Dave Jenks had gone on with his work. But we'd met again last year at the Christmas reunion and had a hell of a time, and he told me what he was doing. The upshot of it was that I got him to take a leave of absence, outfitted a lab for him, and let him work. I'd seen him maybe half a dozen times in the six months that had followed.

Then, the day before, I phoned and left word for him that I was really marrying Dorothy Dykstra and I wanted him to come to my wedding. I wanted the society notes to say that a real Professor, a useful member of society, was there, in addition to the kind of people I knew.

And this morning the telegram had come. Had it really been so strangely worded, or was it the hangover? I might as well admit it: I'd been drinking on other days besides Fridays since the day Dorothy asked me to marry her and I said yes. Not that I mean I didn't do the actual proposing. Don't get me wrong. Dorothy was a fine girl, too good for me; only for a guy like me . . . anyway, I suppose the idea of getting married frightened me, and to hell with what the gossip columns say.

But I'll tell you this: I had the craziest feeling something was wrong with Dave Jenks. Miss my wedding? Dave? I tried to remember the phone conversation, and I decided I had spoken to him. He had sounded terribly upset. And I had gotten so stinko it had slipped my mind the minute I left the phone booth and saw the bar again. But would you believe it—the whole thing didn't sober me up even then!

We pulled into East Thirty-eighth in a hurry. It was a dead-end street, fronting on the river, and at this hour it was quiet and empty. The lab building itself was an old red-brick affair,

two stories high. There were lights on upstairs.

Before we had a chance to ring the bell, the downstairs door swung open, and there stood two men, almost as big as Mahoney. One of them jerked his head at us in a silent invitation to come in. In the darkness I barely made out the black automatic in his hand.

"Jeez!" Mahoney roared. "Another minute and I'd have laid the both of you out colder than an Eskimo's donkey!"

"It's Mahoney," said the man with the gun. "It's nobody but old blow-hard Mahoney. What the hell are you doing here?"

"What am *I* doing here?" Mahoney demanded. "What are you doing here? Why ain't you G-men out chasing spies like in the comics?"

"You should talk!" the man retorted. "I hear that bunch of ambulance chasers you work for got you playing nurse-maid to a rich—"

"PARDON me," I said, edging past them, or trying to, when the door at the top of the stairwell opened and two more men came out, one of them—their chief, as it turned out—shouting down to inquire what the rumpus was about. So Mahoney introduced me. It was one of the few times his connections came in handy. Did I mention that he was a bodyguard wished on me by Riley, Riley and Shapiro? And a good one, too.

The chief's name was Bancroft—a bony, red-faced man. He said something about Jenks having tried to get me all over town and led me through the lab. Meanwhile he was muttering something to himself, but I hardly listened because I was busy trying to see what was going on there. Jenks' four assistants were standing around near one of the long lab benches. They were quiet, sober-faced men in stained lab coats, and one of them, the blonde Yarovitch, nodded politely to me. Everything seemed to be in order. The myriad bottles and vials and retorts and complicated mechanisms gleamed brightly, and the eye was everywhere attracted by the colorful dabs of liquids in pots and test-tubes that bubbled and smoked like they do in the Boris Karloff pictures. But it was the rational, meticulous laboratory I'd known. . . .

When Bancroft opened the door to Jenks' private workroom, I saw that Jenks had been waiting for us, as if he had been afraid to leave the room—as indeed he might have been, if only to avoid facing his staff in his present condition. He ran across the room, seizing my hand. "Woody!" he cried, his features working, "I've been trying to get you all day. Thank God you've come!"

I'd never seen him so overwrought, nor suspected his capacity for such distress. He had always been as unemotional as a scientific experiment. When I stole a glance at Bancroft, I saw that he too was waiting for Jenks to speak, though, as I subsequently learned, he had already heard the story once. And what a story it was, when Jenks did speak . . . what an incredible story. . . .

Put briefly, though none the less stunningly for it, the total result was this: that he and his staff, working together, had accidentally discovered the formula for a new explosive of tremendous power, and that this formula had either been stolen already, or was about to be stolen. And the thief was one, possibly more than one, of the members of Jenks' staff.

Naturally, there were numerous details to be explained in this brief account, and though I was hardly in a condition where I welcomed asking questions, I did ask a few.

What did Jenks mean, first of all, by saying that the discovery was accidental? Perhaps more to the point, how was it that a man engaged in psychological research had wandered so far afield?

He shook off my questions impatiently. I was neglecting one of the most important aspects of his work. He was not only an experimenter in symptoms, an investigator of superficial behavior. He was as much a physiologist, a physicist, a chemist, as anything else. He was, he told us, speaking, as always when he spoke of his work, in florid, almost archaic language, a scientist of the human mind. I agreed that his work had taken him along strange paths before, and in this case, he said, one of the by-products of his work had been this chemical formula.

"My staff and I shared the work," he told us. "Our tasks were minutely broken up and inter-related. One part was meaningless without the rest. Only I knew the specific direction of our work—I was looking for a new drug, to produce a new pattern of behavior . . . it doesn't matter now what it was. . . . But somewhere along the course of these separate experiments, the paths crossed—and that crossroad was this new explosive!

"Do you see what I mean?" he asked anxiously. "Of course, when the time came for checking our work (I generally correlated our experiments every few weeks) I would have seen this crossroad myself. Or at least I think so. But what happened was that someone on my staff, in some way, saw it for himself. This person, or persons, understood the nature of this by-product immediately! . . ."

HE PAUSED for a few moments, collecting himself.

"I first suspected it three nights ago," he went on. "I had come back to the lab Tuesday night, and I came in here to finish a test. I set the test up, and then, having an hour to wait for a precipitation, I set my alarm clock, turned off the lights, and took a nap. Something wakened me during that hour. I thought I heard a voice from the outer lab, and listening at the door, hearing numerous pauses in what seemed to be a conversation—though only one voice spoke—I realized that whoever it was out there was speaking on the phone.

"The outer lab phone has an extension in here. I lifted the receiver and listened. I couldn't tell who it was out there, but the conversation concerned the experiments we've been carrying on here—I heard just enough to convince me of that. But mainly, what these two spoke of was some urgent business that was to be consummated this week. This Sunday, the voice at the other end repeated several times, with emphatic insistence.

"The laboratory voice said that not all the notes had been taken down yet, that it might take more time, especially to avoid asking for notes not yet due this experimenter. Sunday, said the voice at the other end, adding that no attempt was to be made to get in touch with him until then. He would contact the experimenter himself in his own way and take the notes.

"When the laboratory voice asked how he would know this other person (and this was the first indication I had that neither man knew the other personally) the answer was that he would approach shortly after four o'clock and ask what time it was, and upon being told, he would then say: 'But that is impossible.' His final word was for this experimenter, naturally, to keep himself available during that hour, pre-

ferably outdoors.

"The moment the conversation ended, I started for the door, hoping to surprise whoever it was. Unfortunately, in the darkness I fell across a stool, and made enough noise to warn the person in the next room. I ran out then and turned on all the lights. There was no one there. I searched the entire lab systematically, and at the door I found this. . . ."

Jenks held out a section of moving picture film. It was rolled up, perhaps six inches in length, and designed for an 8 mm. camera. I offered it to Bancroft, who said he had already seen it. I held it up to the light and saw that each frame held a view of a sheet of paper, each sheet covered with writing and chemical symbols.

"These are photographs of five pages of notes," said Jenks. "Two of them are my own, two others are Miller's, and the last is Forman's. Mr. Bancroft says they may be compact copies of pictures taken by another camera. It seems to be a section of a longer length of film."

Jenks stopped speaking for a moment, and his attitude resembled that of a man listening intently, but all I heard was the constant ringing in my ears. I was sick. I had troubles of my own, and here I was mixed up in something with G-men. Not that I wasn't concerned: David Jenks meant too much to me for that. I tried to meet his eyes then, but their grey depths had turned cold and opaque. When he spoke again, it was with a great weariness.

"I began checking over all our notes. That was Tuesday night, and I've been here ever since. Early this morning I found what I was looking for . . . the accidental juncture of our experiments. A tiny pinch of powder. . . ." He held up a thumb and forefinger, ". . . no more than three milligrams, forming the residue of this fantastic compound, exerted enough force to smash a large steel cylinder to bits."

BANCROFT whistled. "Where'd you try it?"

"In the yard behind this building, early this morning. But after that I didn't know what to do. When my staff arrived this morning, I realized how helpless I was. That was when I wired you, Woody. I had remembered your phoning and inviting me to the wedding. I thought if I said something about a discovery, and the fact that it would prevent me from attending, that it would bring you immediately."

"I had a hangover," I said, feeling like a damned fool.

"And when you did call this afternoon, I couldn't get a coherent word out of you. You said you were at the Astor bar, so I understood." He said it without reproach, stating a melancholy fact as only an old friend like he could have done. "So I gave up and called the F.B.I. in. It seemed to me that, in times like these, such a dangerous—"

"But you called me back," I said, "then you hung up before I had—"

"What's the difference?" Bancroft moaned, impatiently. "I been here long enough to hear the story twice now and I still don't know a lot of things. Listen, Professor, does your staff know why we're here?"

"I told them nothing. But surely one of them knows only too well."

"Assuming it's only one of them. Tell me this: has this person had a chance to get at the rest of the notes since then?"

"Perhaps. I couldn't very well tell my staff to stop working before I knew what, if anything, had happened. They needed the notes."

Bancroft scratched his head. "The hell with it," he said. "It don't make any difference. The important thing—and I'll be damned if I understand it—is the fact that our culprit has a definite appointment this Sunday at four o'clock. If we keep him in sight—"

"Keep which one in sight?" I mumbled.

"All four of them. Even if the culprit thinks he's suspected, we know he has no way of changing the appointment. All we have to do is keep shadowing the four of them, and the best way is to keep a twenty-four hour watch on them. Offhand it sounds tough, but we're in luck. I got it all figured out, and you have to help us, Mr. Woodruff."

"Sure," I said. "You want me to adopt one?"

"Amounts to the same thing," he said. "I want you to invite the whole staff to your wedding."

"Huh?"

"Why not? How many people you honestly expecting there?"

"Millions," I said. "The way it looks now, half the town plans to week-end at Seaside."

Seaside was the estate my paternal grandfather had built in the days when millionaires lived like feudal barons. It was an enormous place, to which my father had added greenhouses and I swimming pools. It occupied an island all its own, twenty miles from the city and a hundred yards off the South Shore of Long Island, to which it was connected by a covered, rustic bridge.

"Millions," said Bancroft, happily, "is what I read by the papers. So you invite the staff for the week-end. Sort of a vacation for them. And I station my men all around the place. The beautiful part—"

"It stinks," I said. "My wedding's scheduled for four o'clock."

"I'm amazed at you, Mr. Woodruff. I hope you don't think we'd allow the slightest disturbance. No, sir! And the beautiful part of it is the fact that whoever is going to meet our culprit—why, he'll have no trouble at all crashing your wedding!"

"Sure," I said. "Every deadbeat in town'll be there."

"Fine, fine!" Bancroft enthused, rubbing his hands. "Here's the dope. I take my gang away, and you, Professor Jenks, tell your staff anything you can think of, then say Mr. Woodruff invited them for the week-end."

"What if they don't want to go?" I asked.

"Impossible! I heard you're going to serve breast of pheasant. Champagne, roast suckling—" He stopped himself and took a deep breath. "But just in case, Professor, you tell them that they have to go—they can't afford to offend Mr. Woodruff. He pays the bills and so on."

"Boy, are you building up my character," I groaned.

"Why not? You're a great guy, Mr. Woodruff, a great guy! And now, Professor, you come in there with me and tell them."

HE HALF shook my arm out of its socket and led Jenks out, leaving me alone in the smaller lab. I closed my eyes and let my head go for a swim. What an incredible business it was. And there I was, mixed up in it. I thought of Dorothy and I half remembered a dinner date I'd had. It was now eight o'clock. If Dorothy had had the slightest inkling of the new mess I was in . . . She had no use for Jenks. The one or two times she'd come with me to the lab, she had reminded me how much it was costing me to keep it going. . . .

Lord, I thought, if I had a drink. A

good, stiff shot. Jenks was no teetotaler, either. He used to drink rum in a water glass; one slice of lemon and one pint of rum—drinking time: five minutes. I took the keys that were in the door and began hunting through the large desk, and damn it—there it was! Just where he had kept it in school, bottom drawer, rear. Not very much, just a shot or so, but that bit of good Jamaica rum looked like quiescent fire through the pale amber of the slender bottle. Did I say fire? Maybe you won't believe it—but when I uncorked it, the damned stuff actually let out a tiny whiff of smoke! Smoke, you understand, like woodsmoke, like the smell of wet logs smouldering, like the smell of fog in the fall. A wonderful smell.

So I put it down without further ado, shook my head, stuck out my tongue and said, "Ah-h-h-h," and felt fine . . . if I felt anything. . . .

Because I had the strangest feeling. I felt as if I had left the place, as if I was then at home—my city home, I mean. But I was also leaving a place far uptown, and I was driving a car furiously, trying to get home. And I was also getting into a cab and asking to go home. In short, everywhere I thought I was, I wanted to go home.

And sitting there on Dave's desk, I really wanted to go home. It was the rum, I knew, on top of the Astor bar. I felt as sick as a dog, and I wanted to go home. Know what I mean?

Then Jenks came in. "It's all right, Woody," he said. "They're all going home for some clothes and they'll meet in half an hour to go out to Seaside together." I could hear the sound of taxi horns outside very plainly. "Bancroft said they'd be followed all the time until they get together again—he got the cabs himself."

I said, "I want to go home, too."

There was silence, and it continued. After a while I opened my eyes and looked at Jenks. I took one look at him and almost fainted. It was the way he was standing there, looking at me and at the empty bottle I had put down on his chair. His face was absolutely frozen. The blood had run out of it. He stood immobile, horror and fear etched in his lean features, and his eyes glistening but unseeing.

"Woody . . . Woody . . ." he whispered, *"did you drink that?"*

I nodded.

"Woody . . ." He couldn't say anything else. He lurched across the room and picked the empty bottle up in his hands. Then, slowly, he sank into the chair, staring at the bottle, then raising his eyes and looking at me. I wanted to say something bright, something like, "The hell with it. I'll get you another bottle." But this crazy fear had somehow gotten hold of me. I didn't remember when I first felt afraid, but it was there, a powerful, oppressive fear.

"Stop looking at me that way!" I cried out suddenly. "What's the matter with the bottle? Say something, damn you!"

Presently he said, "Woody, that story I told Bancroft isn't true." He barely whispered the words. He was holding the bottle so tightly that the tips of his fingers were white.

"What isn't true?" I said. "What are you talking about?"

"The part about the explosive isn't true. Woody, do you remember what I told once about . . . about . . . isolating evil?" He looked at me in that terrible way. "Woody!" he gasped. "I did it! I found a compound that does it! Do you understand me?"

MY HEAD was reeling.

"Woody, we were in school

then. You remember the talks we used to have, about personality, about character, about what made men what they are. They were experimenting with things like the truth serum in those days—they were opening all the twisted, crazy worlds hidden in man's subconscious—they were drugging him, studying his brain, searching parts of his soul that they had never been able to expose before. . . .

"That's what I've been doing here these months, Woody. I've been compounding drugs, hoping to find one that might unlock the door to the evil in man—*to find a drug that would isolate the essential evils in a man,* that would magnify them so they could be examined minutely, so that motivation might be understood, so that greed and cowardice, lust and treachery might be examined. . . ."

"I remember," I said. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"Woody, the formula this person was stealing from me was the formula for this drug! Don't you see? I found the drug—and it's a thousand times more dangerous than any explosive! The man who knew how to make that drug could hold the key to chaos! . . ." He stared at me mutely. "I couldn't tell Bancroft that. I made up the story about the explosive. But if an enemy of our country were to get hold of the formula . . . a few gallons in a reservoir . . . in a lake, a river . . ."

"What does the drug do?" I heard my voice as if in a dream.

"It releases everything evil in him. It unchains the beast in a man, frees his passions, his desires."

"And that's the formula—" I stopped short. He was staring at the bottle, and for the first time I began to understand what he had tried to tell me, without finding the courage. A little shiver ran through me. I closed my eyes and I felt I was home. "Dave," I said, "you mean that you had that compound in this rum bottle."

"Yes, God help us."

"What's going to happen to me?"

"I don't know . . . I don't know!" he cried. "A hundred c.c.'s of it is enough. You drank it all, a thousand times the dose I know anything about! What made you do it, you insane. . . ." And then he cracked. He couldn't go on. He just sat there helplessly, tears running down his face, looking at the amber bottle.

A long time passed. Outside a horn sounded once, twice. Then the bell rang. I heard Mahoney's voice bellowing from outside, saying he was waiting for us.

"I feel all right," I said; but when I tried to stand up, I was wobbly, as usual. "I don't feel evil at all," I said, steadying myself. "Except maybe I think I need a drink. And I want to go home. Boy, do I want to go home."

"I'll go with you," Jenks said. "I've got to go with you."

"You've got to get some clothes yourself," I said. "We'll stop by at your place." So we went down to the cab Mahoney had, and Mahoney shot me a sharp look that told me he was dying to know what was up. He took a second look at Jenks, and it seemed to convince him not to ask. We got to Jenks' place at Gramercy, and when Jenks showed his reluctance to leave me alone even for a few minutes, the mystified expression on Mahoney's face made me burst out laughing.

"I feel great," I laughed. "Hurry down, Dave."

And in that moment, as he left, I had that same absurd sensation of being in several other places. I closed my eyes, and I saw myself entering my apartment. It was an amazing vision. Every little object in the foyer

was distinctly clear, not the way things are in one's imagination, but in reality. The next instant, as I had somehow expected, Robert, the butler, having heard my key in the door, came hurrying into the foyer.

"MR. WOODY! Please!" he cried, astonished and perplexed. "I don't understand what you're doing, sir, really I don't!" And I knew why he was saying it—because I had already let myself in twice . . . no, three times; and each time I had gone into my study, only to appear at the door again. He thought I kept going out the back way.

"Driver," I said suddenly, "take us to 800 Central Park South."

"Hey, boss!" Mahoney protested. "You're supposed to wait for the professor. What's the big idea?"

I didn't know myself. All I knew was that I had to get home.

"And drive like mad!" I yelled at the driver. I had closed my eyes again and seen a girl sitting in the living room, a dark, lovely girl, with two suitcases on the floor near her.

Mahoney bounced off the seat as the startled driver suddenly let his clutch out. "Ah-hah! I get it!" Mahoney cried. "You and the professor have been auld-lang-syneing again with a bottle of rum. What the hell does he do—brew the stuff up there?"

The cab was racing up Fifth Avenue. I sat there, looking out of the window, and this time I hardly had to let my eyes close. . . . I saw myself entering the apartment for a fourth time. . . . I shook my head.

"Mahoney," I said, dizzily, "what does it mean?"

"It means you're past even your quota," Mahoney said moodily.

We were home soon afterward. Mahoney held my arm as inconspicuously as he could going through the lobby, and the elevator man said his good evening without batting an eye. We got off at my floor and I got out my key.

"The menagerie must be out at Seaside already," Mahoney said.

"No," I said. "Robert's waiting for me here." I knew, you see.

I opened the door and went into the foyer. I closed the door quietly; and instantly I heard Robert approaching. He would have been noiseless on the carpet if his shoes hadn't squeaked. He hurried his two hundred and fifty pounds into the foyer and stopped dead.

"Mr. Woody, you've got to stop it," he moaned. He sat down on a fragile Chippendale chair and mopped his forehead. He was breathing heavily. "I don't understand it," he said, wearily. "Have you been trying to meet Mr. Mahoney in the hall? Is that it, sir?"

Mahoney swallowed loudly. "Do you mind telling me what you're talking about?" he exclaimed, baffled. "Don't tell me that Robert, the perfect butler, has finally taken to imbibing of the crushed grape?"

"I'll thank you to keep out of this, Mr. Mahoney!" Robert said.

"With pleasure! With alacrity, too, whatever that is! One of these days the asylum is going to discover a branch outfit here!"

I threw Robert my coat, and walking into the living room, I saw her. That girl I had seen before, when I closed my eyes. There she was, sitting on one of the couches, legs crossed, smoking a cigarette, and her two suitcases nearby.

She hardly raised her eyes when I walked up to her.

"Hello, you," I said.

"Not again, Mr. Woodruff," she said,

reprovingly. "Please, not again. I'm beginning to feel the way your butler does."

What a beautiful girl she was. She had black, lustrous hair and eyes so blue that the contrast was startling. She was wearing an evening gown of gold cloth, and a little ermine jacket covered one shoulder.

"You know," I said, "I hardly know how to tell you this, but—"

"You saw me in a dream, Mr. Woodruff," she said, pleasantly, but I could see she was the least bit annoyed. "In a sort of vision," she said. "That makes five times you've said it. Believe me, Mr. Woodruff, I accept it as an imperishable truth. I don't know what you're trying to prove, but I'll accept that, too. Yes, I'll wait here while you hurry into dinner clothes. Yes, I know you have some urgent business in the library."

THE absolutely crazy part of it was that I had been about to say the very things she said for me. I don't know why. I knew that I had to get into the study—the library, she called it—without knowing exactly why. The way I knew I had to get home.

"But who are you?" I blurted.

She smiled. "Very well, we'll do it again," she said. "Only this time promise me that if you like the way I introduce myself, we'll call it quits." She stood up and extended a hand. She was slender, and her figure . . . I was getting married in two days, I remembered. "I'm Ann Hunter. You had an appointment with me this afternoon, remember? I'm the photographer who's going to take the pictures of your wedding. Oh, it's perfectly all right. No excuses necessary, I assure you. If you'd had the slightest idea of how interesting a photographer was being sent, you'd have torn yourself away. Yes, of course I'll wait." And she smiled again, with that beautiful, impersonal smile.

"I'll be out as soon as I can," I said. "Mahoney, you wrestle yourself into that soup and fish I rented for you."

It was only then, when I looked at Mahoney, that I realized how I felt. He moved his big shoulders slowly, like a man struggling feebly with some unseen assailant, and his face was a hopeless blank. "Yeah," he said, shuffling away. "Yeah, I gotta get dressed."

I nodded politely and went upstairs to the study. The apartment was a duplex, with an upstairs bedroom and adjoining study. The door was locked. I fumbled around for a key and opened it.

I don't know how long I stood there with the door open. It seemed an eternity before I could think that perhaps I had better shut it. I remember how I felt when I saw what was in the study, but there's no way of describing the sensation. It was like . . . like knowing, suddenly, that you've gone insane, and knowing that this is the last coherent thought you will ever have . . . like stopping to exist, but feeling somehow that your mind is still slowly functioning . . . something terrifying and unbelievable and meaningless and, yes . . . and funny too, in a way. . . . I stood there, my back pressed against the door, and I looked slowly from one to the other, trying to think, but somehow knowing what it meant all at once, and in one blinding flash—say, of intuition—but even more than that, of *knowing* actually, I understood it. . . .

For there, sitting in my study, were four men. The four men were all me. I know what it sounds like, but that's the only way to put it. One sat carelessly on a corner of my desk. A second was at the window that faced the

park. A third leaned back in my favorite chair and drew on a cigarette. The fourth was stretched out on the small leather couch. They were all wearing gray tweeds identical with my own suit, and their shoes, shirts, ties were duplicates of mine. They seemed to have been waiting for me, for as I entered, the one on the couch sat up expectantly and turned to look at the others, as if to say here I was.

They might have been my doubles, but they weren't. They were me, beyond all similarity of clothes. They sat like me, they smoked the way I did. Every movement, every gesture, was mine. Every line of their faces was mine. Standing there, looking at them, meeting their gaze, I thought that any one of them might be me, and somehow . . . that I couldn't be sure I wasn't . . . one . . . of . . . them. The instant the thought occurred I knew it was because they wanted it—that to a large extent they knew what I thought, just as I knew what they were thinking about. Not entirely, of course, but I knew.

CHAPTER II

Who's Who

I DON'T know how long the silence lasted . . . that cold, electric, clairvoyant silence. It was the man who sat in my chair who finally put it into words. He crushed his cigarette deliberately, and he said in a quiet voice, "There's no sense sitting here this way. There must be a solution to this deadlock and we've got to find it."

Suddenly I laughed out loud. I understood what he meant. There was something terrifying in the idea, that and something more, a sort of fascination that held me in a relentless grip. I had to laugh to find a release.

"But I'm the real Woodruff," I said. "You know I am."

The man at the window said, without turning around, "Are you?"

The man on the couch smiled lazily and held his hands out in a palms-up gesture of inquiry. "But if you're the real Woodruff, who am I? There's really no meaning in what you say. Who is the *real* Clyde Woodruff? Is he you, or is he . . ." and he smiled again, because we all knew what he meant.

There was a knock on the door and Robert's voice came through it.

"Professor Jenks is here, Mr. Woody. He wants to come in."

I didn't know what to do. Before I could think; the man who had been sitting in my chair got up and crossed rapidly to the door. He called, "Coming, Robert!" and he opened the door just enough for Robert to see him. "I've been waiting for you, Dave," he said, and he started to open the door.

I didn't want Jenks to come in. I was afraid of what might happen to him if he saw what was in the room. I watched the door open a bit farther, and then the man said, "I'm sorry I ran off, Dave. I felt sick for a moment, but I'm all right now. Be with you as soon as I'm dressed. You use one of the guest rooms." And he closed the door before Jenks had had a chance to come in.

Or, rather, I closed that door. I closed it without moving, without raising a hand. I did it because I *willed* it—as I had willed the words the man at the door had said. And I knew, as we all did, that I had not been alone in wanting the door shut, in not wanting Jenks to come in. At least two others—though which two, neither I nor anyone else knew—had shared my thoughts and impulse!

I knew this as I knew everything else.

Somehow I had only to seek deep inside myself, or inside the common mind I seemed to share with these four men, to find the answers. I knew then that we were inextricably bound together. When we were alone, each of us shared this common mind, and yet each of us retained a mind that was private. So long as we were alone, and our thoughts and actions concerned none but ourselves, freedom of will and thought and action existed.

But it did not exist when it concerned anyone else!

The moment it became necessary to speak to anyone else (to anyone of the outer world, I found myself thinking) or to show ourselves, or *one* of ourselves —in short, any positive *action* of any kind that involved anyone but us five —from that instant it became necessary to obtain the acquiescence, at least, of a majority of the five of us!

I knew, standing there, that from the moment I had entered this room, I had become the prisoner of these four men. It was their combined will that had so irresistibly driven me home. And I knew also that each of the others was as much a prisoner of the other four as I was. Or, to bring it to its final end, the five of us were, at any time, the captives of three of us who thought and willed alike.

And the most bitter part of this monstrous pact was the knowledge that none of us could predict how our diverse wills might act. For we were basically antagonists, locked in a mortal struggle.

But perhaps you don't understand what I'm trying to say.

THINK of a man, one man. Was he, in reality, one man? Was he not the synthesis of many men? He could think what he liked, desire all he dared. His mind might be the battleground of conflicting desires, he might be tortured by yearnings and lust—but the wounds of these battles and the scars of these lusts, could remain his secret forever. He would be known by what he had done, by the sum of his actions.

Then, suppose there was a way of unlocking these secrets?

Suppose the synthesis of men that was every man—suppose that synthesis was broken down to its dominant components? Suppose the conflicting qualities of his character were released from influence by each other, were allowed to go free, to do with the man as they liked?

Suppose the battle that had always been an inner one became a battle visible to the outer world? Suppose the battleground of the mind was transferred to the battleground of the real world. . . .

For that was what had happened to me.

I knew who these four men were. I knew what they represented in me. I knew what one of them meant when he said: "Who is the *real* Clyde Woodruff?" I knew I was the real Clyde Woodruff, but looking around the room, recognizing the other Woodruffs, the men who were part of me, I understood what he meant.

For David Jenks, seeking to isolate the essential evils in a man, had found his drug. Perhaps it was the overdose, the dose he knew nothing about, that had done it, but his experiment had gone beyond his wildest dreams. The evils in Clyde Woodruff had been released—all of them—but they had now taken their independence in tangible form!

I said it before, and I say it again—I know what it sounds like. It was impossible. It was insane, meaningless, it couldn't have happened. Call it anything you like. *But it had happened....*

That was what I meant when I said we were inextricably bound together, that we were the prisoners of each other. We were like that one man who held the many men within him as captives. We had our own minds, but we shared a mind in common. We had our own will, our own ability to act, but it was subject to the combined will, as the actions of every man are, in the final analysis, the decision of the whole man. Here the whole man had become five men.

And that was what I meant when I said we were basically antagonists. For the five men were locked in a struggle for survival, each determined that he alone would seurvive. Yet, understanding the limitations that bound him, each was ready for expedient alliances, for temporary compromise.

Each of the five were determined that he alone would be the real Clyde Woodruff. Looking at them was like introspecting. Most men can identify the evil in themselves—and in that way I could identify the men who were in the room with me . . . not as individuals, but collectively. I looked at them and knew them, as they must have known me, and some of the terror I had felt was gone.

I wasn't afraid of them any more. I was Woodruff. I had kept them prisoner before, and I could win again. It was the way of winning that worried me now. There were so many other things happening now. I was mixed up with Dave Jenks problem, my wedding—

"*My* wedding," smiled the man on the couch.

"Mine," said the man at the window.

"Or mine," said the man at the desk. "No one of us will be at the wedding unless all of us—or most of us—agree on it. So it may be any one of us who finally goes to the wedding. Why not me?"

You see, they knew what I was thinking. All these thoughts that I have written down here were theirs, too. All the thoughts that bound us were ours in common. Even the identifications. As I thought of them, it was like thinking out loud, for each of them spoke up.

THE man at the window said, "One of us is a fool."

"One of us is a liar," said the man on the couch.

"One of us is a coward," said the man at the desk.

The man near me, the one who had gone to the door, said, "And one of us is a killer. Which leaves the fifth one here unaccounted for, so we may safely assume that he is the real Woodruff all of us claim to be. The Woodruff who is master of these evils." He added, reflectively, "What a peculiar man this Woodruff is. For all his good nature and such minor failings as lying—"

"He lies magnificently," interrupted the man on the couch. "Only that talent saves him. The man's troubles are legendary."

"Which may explain the fool in the room. And possibly the coward. What an unpleasant thought it is for a man to realize he is a coward. But who could have suspected that Clyde Woodruff could also be a killer? How strange."

"Nonsense!" I snapped. "I've a temper, but it's a rare occasion when I lose it. As for being a coward—"

Jenks was knocking on the door again. "Woody!" he called. "What's keeping you in there? Who's in there with you?"

So he could hear us. It must have sounded as if I was talking to myself. "There's no one in here," I called back.

"But I can hear you talking. Is anything wrong?"

"I'm talking to myself. Will you

please sit down and wait for me to get dressed? Entertain Miss Hunter. Give her a drink or something."

He went away. "What was I saying?" I said, irritably. "It doesn't matter now. The main thing is that none of us wants Jenks to come in here and see us, and it's a sure thing that he'll come in if I don't go out. So if you gentlemen will wait here until—"

"You're not going anywhere," said the man at the window.

"But I've got to go! I'm due at Seaside this minute!"

It was a mistake to have spoken as I did. I saw it then. Each of them had referred to Woodruff in the third person, but I had somehow violated the unexpressed agreement. And there was no sense saying I had to go, when my going was for them to decide.

"Precisely," said the man at the window. "You're behaving like a fool. It seems a fair clue to your identity."

"Or like a clever liar," said the man beside me, smiling coldly.

There was nothing I could do, and knowing it, I still went to the door and tried to open it. I couldn't move the door-knob. My hand wouldn't respond. I stood there, shaking with anger that was past concealing, my mind a furious, bewildered haze, scarcely able to function.

The man on the couch looked at me with a great show of interest. "The temper, I see," he said, flexing his hands. "One could hardly suspect such capacity for anger. But if we're going to take guesses at each other's identity. . . ." and he looked at all of us.

That was the way it began, in unspoken agreement among them. In that, and in all of the ensuing conversation, I took no part. I listened to them with the sensation of a man in a dream, alive only by virtue of a feverish, futile rage that burned within me, but for all of it, I knew I was bound by everything they decided.

FOR we had silently entered upon a new compact, understanding immediately what the man on the couch had left unfinished. *". . . if we're going to take guesses at each other's identity—why not guess with stakes in the balance? Do we all claim to be Clyde Woodruff? Then we'll end the deadlock. We'll make the stakes the only ones that mean anything to us: survival. We'll let each of us have a chance at action, at being Clyde Woodruff. . . ."*

"And the penalty?"

"Instant dissolution! . . . We all understand what we mean by that. We bind ourselves here irrevocably, to surrender our independent existence as the penalty for failure to protect the secret of our identity."

"How will it operate?"

"We'll draw straws to determine an order. The first to go will leave this room as Clyde Woodruff. We four here will, naturally, know everything he does, everything he says and sees and hears. Thus scrutinized, he will remain Clyde Woodruff until one of us ventures a guess as to his identity. If the guess is correct, he surrenders existence—and instantly his place is taken. The next to go becomes Woodruff in whatever circumstance the previous Woodruff was left—no matter where he was, or what he was doing, so that the actions of one affects all."

"And if the guess is wrong?"

"Whoever makes a wrong guess pays the penalty himself."

"How will we determine whether the guess is right or wrong?"

"When one of us makes a guess, the other three here must venture their own guesses too. Whenever three of the four agree, the judgment of the major-

ity will be correct—and the other, wrong."

"What if the guesses vary, and no majority can agree?"

"Then whoever was Woodruff at the time will go to the end of the line. By this action, he will measurably improve his own chances for survival, while at the same time we will be commensurately penalized."

"Ah, but suppose the first to go is identified by three of us as, say, the coward—when in reality he is someone else?"

"The question is meaningless. You might compare it to a man who believed he had acted like a coward. Could anyone but he ever really know the truth? The world may judge a man to have been brave, when he knows the opposite is true. Only a man who knows what he is capable of doing—thus, a man who understands himself—can correctly judge his actions. Only he can weigh the alternatives that faced him as an individual. And as we here are the several components of a man who now understands himself, our decision will be as final as it must be right."

"But what of this: suppose the one whom we judged the coward was the real Woodruff—the fifth one here?"

"Understand this: there is no real Woodruff, in the sense you mean it. We are all the real Woodruff now, but only one of us will survive this, and that survivor will be the real Woodruff. If the one you call real is identified as the coward—he is the coward. And he pays the penalty."

"Very well. But what happens to the majority rule when there are only four left, then three, and finally . . . two?"

"The one who is Woodruff at any given time will never vote. Excepting him now, four of us will remain, and three will be a majority. When the next one leaves, three will remain here, and two will be a majority. After that, when two are left here in this room, they will have to agree to be able to render a binding decision."

"But, finally, two will be left—one of them here in this room, the other acting as Woodruff. Who will decide between them?"

"Either one may then take his guess. To make it binding, he will have to offer the other incontrovertible evidence."

"Such as?"

"The testimony of a third person, perhaps. Why not? The problem becomes intriguing. Incontrovertible evidence will consist of the testimony of a third person, identifying him in agreement with the guesser."

"But how can such testimony be gotten?"

"We leave that to the devices of the last two survivors."

AND now that the terms of the pact were settled, it remained only to seal them. There was no clasping of hands, no outward sign, and not a word was said, but the bargain was made. I thought then that it might have been different if one of us had been treacherous and untrustworthy, but there wasn't. Whatever evil was in this room, whether cowardice or stupidity, murder or falsehood, the word of all of us was sufficient. I was bound by the decision whether I wanted it or not.

But other things had gone through my mind. I had seen them almost at once, though I hadn't allowed myself to think about them. I had kept telling myself that this fantastic game would work out somehow. But I had not lost sight of the enormously dangerous situation in which Jenks, and to a large extent, in which I was involved. Because of what I now knew, it loomed in the background as something infinitely

more fraught with disaster than whatever faced me personally. Insidiously, a subconscious, recurrent fear had grown in me—a fear that Jenks had not told me everything. Was it because he dared tell no one? What was to happen before this had ended . . . if end it would . . . this insane web that had trapped me and left me powerless to interfere with the pattern in which it was presently to unravel itself?

I saw only one hope—to draw the first chance, to regain my freedom of action and instantly tell Jenks everything!

One of the four had taken a package of pipe cleaners from my desk. He cut five graduated lengths, hiding the uneven ends in his palm. The shortest was to go first, the others in order. In spite of my almost feverish anxiety, I was aware of the irony in the situation —that each of these four men who wanted to be *me* were still hoping to draw the last position, while I had banked my hope on going first.

Too much hope, for when it was over, I saw that I had drawn the third position. . . .

The man who had been at the window was first. Without a word to us, he went through the connecting door into my bedroom and began to change into the evening clothes my valet had laid out. When he shut the door, he had severed all primary contact with us.

We heard him call Robert (though we knew it without hearing him) and instruct him to close both doors leading to the study. Under no circumstances, he said, were the doors to be opened, or anyone let in.

I went to my desk and took a sheaf of paper and a pen. The others watched me curiously, for since this was a private action and concerned none but me, they had no way of knowing what I intended to do.

I was going to write an account of everything that had happened, and of everything that was going to happen. Since I would know only of actions, my account would be written in third person—but precisely because of this, they were powerless to stop me!

So long as they were with me I could not communicate with the outer world, but I could plan such communication behind the barrier of my own private thoughts, secure in my private world. For whatever good it might somehow accomplish, to whatever use I might put it, I had determined to preserve a record.

You have been reading this record. The rest of it follows from the time *Clyde Woodruff* left his bedroom. From that moment on, the rest of us in the study were intent upon everything that happened, watching for the slightest clue to the real identity of *Clyde Woodruff,* the clue that would enable us to prove him either a coward, a liar, a killer or a fool—the clue that would mean his end. . . .

CHAPTER III

And Then There Were Four

AS Woodruff came out of his room, the first thing that forced itself upon his notice was the strained, miserable look that seemed indelibly imprinted on David Jenks' face. It appeared that Jenks was about to say something, or commit some action which he had already decided, for he got up, unsteady from the effects of several drinks, his manner tense, and began to say, "Woody, I must—"

He got no further. Woodruff cheerfully interrupted by saying, "No, you mustn't. No one must say anything now," and abruptly breaking the trend

of conversation, he went on, "Miss Hunter, I see you're drinking them straight, and I congratulate you. Robert, tell William to bring the car around downstairs. And you, Mahoney—"

"Beg pardon, Mr. Woody," Robert broke in, unhappily. "William drove Miss Dykstra to Seaside an hour ago. I tried to tell you, sir, but you kept running in and out of the hall." Confronted by the blank look on Woodruff's face, he blurted, "But you had a dinner engagement at the Dykstras' tonight! Didn't Alonzo list it on your memorandum?"

Woodruff looked at Mahoney and Mahoney grimly shook his head. A groan escaped Robert, but with sudden vehemence he turned on Mahoney. "I trust you'll stop interfering with the way this household is run after this, Mr. Mahoney!"

"Nuts," said Mahoney. "Learn to write English."

"Learn to read it," Robert retorted, acidly, "and nuts in larger quantities to you!" Mopping his forehead, Robert said, "The Dykstras waited until seven, sir, then Miss Dykstra came here and waited and finally went herself. I ordered the convertible."

"Thank you, Robert," Woodruff sighed. "You see how it is, Miss Hunter? Will you pour me a stiff one, please?"

Ann Hunter smiled and poured two drinks, and when Jenks nodded, poured another for him. She raised her glass. "Here's to the complicated life of Mr. Woodruff," she said, "and to Robert, William, Alonzo and Mahoney, the men who keep it that way. And to good pictures of the new complication-to-be in the life of said Mr. Woodruff."

The three touched glasses and drank.

"Gee, boss," said Mahoney reflectively, "what a fresh dame, huh?"

"Yep," Woodruff smiled. "Let's get going now." He helped the girl on with her wrap. "Robert, remember the dim-out regulations and turn off the lights." He added, "I'll take care of the study."

He returned to the study and unlocked it. He crossed the room without saying a word to any of the four men there. After he had securely drawn the shades and black-out curtains, he winked solemnly at the man who sat on the couch and went out without turning off the lights.

In the hall, waiting for the elevator, Jenks touched Woodruff's arm. "Woody," he said, softly, "I've got to talk to you. Is everything all right?"

"Sensational," Woodruff grinned. "Couldn't be better. . . ."

It was a beautiful night. Speeding across the Triborough bridge, they saw Manhattan in its strange, newly found darkness, and somehow as lovely in spite of it. Once a plane droned overhead and suddenly glistened like a tiny moth as two searchlight batteries caught it with white, brilliant fingers. Woodruff switched on the radio to end a brief, hot argument that sprang up between Mahoney and Robert, and after that there was little talking. Once, when Woodruff had difficulty lighting a cigarette, Ann Hunter lit one for him. He yelled something about the lipstick on it, grinned at her dismay and took it anyway.

Forty-five minutes after they had started, they left South Shore Drive and became part of a caravan on the winding, private road that led to Seaside. They heard the house before they came to it—a general, diffuse blanket of sound, loud and gay. The gate-keeper called to them as they went by, and Mahoney sprang up to shout something and sat down quickly as they reached the covered bridge.

SUDDENLY, out of the soft gloom, the columned main house of Seaside loomed before them, and Ann Hunter sighed at the sight. Like all shore houses, Seaside had been blacked out, but accidental splashes of light fell from its careless, festive interior to the terraces and gardens. Inside a band was jamming *Blues In The Night,* the saxophones barely audible over the laughter and confusion.

Woodruff put his fingers in his ears and said, "Home again," and that was the last he saw of any of them for awhile. For his car had been spotted immediately, and the band began swinging the wedding march, and people poured down from the veranda to carry Woodruff back there amid cheering. After that he was lost in a mass of people, shaking hands and taking his turn as glass-filled trays slid by endlessly. He kept laughingly insistent on finding Dorothy, and though dozens of people left to find her for him, nothing came of these excursions.

He was on the dance floor, almost an hour later, when Robert tugged at his arm and whispered something to him. He left the Conga line and followed Robert to the back of the house. Dorothy Dykstra was waiting there, and a strange man with her.

"Hello, Dorothy," Woodruff mumbled. "I've been looking for—"

"We'll go into that later, Woody," said Dorothy, her voice soft but incisive. "Right now you're expected in the garage." She turned to follow the man with her. They went out the back way, Woodruff hurrying along to keep in sight of the flashlight the man carried.

"They've arrested Mr. Mahoney!" Robert breathed, running along.

"Who?"

"They," Robert panted, mysteriously. "The military police."

In the garage they found Mahoney hand-cuffed to a bannister, his mouth covered with a handkerchief. Vague, furious noises came from the handkerchief and he kept kicking out, trying to reach Bancroft and the other two men with him.

"What's going on here?" cried Woodruff in amazement.

Bancroft, his red face more flushed than ever, looking very little like a detective in his evening clothes, said, "Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Woodruff. We've been having quite a time with this ape, Mahoney. I warned him to stop nosing around, but he wouldn't. He keeps talking to my men and identifying them. About ten minutes ago we found him crawling on all fours along the beach, following Miss Dykstra. I'm going to send him back to the city and clap him into the can."

Mahoney suddenly lunged forward and kicked at Bancroft, missing him by inches, while muffled roars issued from the handkerchief.

"Shut up, Mahoney," said Woodruff, going up to him and taking off the gag. "Now what's going on here?"

"What's going on here, huh?" Mahoney roared, feeling his jaw tenderly. "That's what *I* want to know! There's an army of these guys in here! They got all the roads blocked off—I seen one of them at the gates when we drove in, wearing a uniform like the staff. Everywhere I went I found these guys snooping around!"

"Why were you following Miss Dykstra?"

"I was *not* following Miss Dykstra!" Mahoney shouted. "Anyway, I didn't start out to follow her—I must've gotten mixed up. I see a guy following a guy named Miller—the Miller who works in the laboratory—so I follow him. After awhile he spots me and flashes a G-man badge on me and asks



It was a magnificent country home, even for Long Island

me what I want. I tell him who I am and then I come back and keep following him, and pretty soon he goes up to Miller and I hear him call him something like Mulheimer. Then along comes a woman and she calls him Mulheimer too. Then the G-man ducks and the other two go out to the beach, so I follow them. The next thing I know, two more of these crazy G-men jump me and it turns out I'm following Miss Dykstra and the professor by mistake. But I started out fol—"

"The whole story's imaginary," Bancroft interposed. "I've already interviewed my men and none of them spoke to any woman or any—"

"You couldn't interview that army in two days!" Mahoney stormed. "I couldn't make a move without some guy stepping up to me and flashing a badge. I must've run into ten guys in half an hour!"

"So help me, Mahoney," said Bancroft, angrily, "I'm going to keep you in the can until I find out what you're up to." To Woodruff he said, "Aside from the men on road detail, I've no more than five here on the grounds."

"Then where's Miller?" Mahoney demanded. "Why don't you look?"

AT THIS point David Jenks came into the garage, and seeing Woodruff, he said, "I've been hunting you everywhere, Woody. Mahoney half frightened the life out of Dorothy. What do you make of it?"

"Be damned if I know," said Woodruff vaguely. He regarded Mahoney with puzzled eyes, then said, "Turn him loose, Mr. Bancroft. I'll be responsible for his behavior."

"Are you sure you—"

"Yes," said Woodruff, impatiently. "I know what I'm doing. I've known Mahoney longer than a day. Turn him loose."

Reluctantly, Bancroft had the handcuffs removed. Mahoney glared after him as he and his men left. "I got to see you alone for a minute, boss," he said. "There's a couple of things—"

"Get out of here immediately," said Dorothy Dykstra. "Get off the grounds. I'm sick of looking at that stupid face of yours."

Mahoney's face flushed but he stood there. "I take orders from the boss," he said, quietly. "Can I see you for a minute?"

"Not now," said Woodruff. "I know all about it; but it's none of your business, Mahoney, just the same. Take the night off. Go get a good drunk for once in your life. I'll see you later."

Mahoney walked out of the garage without a word, and Robert discreetly went after him. Woodruff turned to Dorothy. "I'm sorry about Mahoney, dear. He takes his job very seriously. You shouldn't have said what you did to him."

"Is that all you have to say to me?" Standing there, her eyes were cool even now and anger made her quite beautiful, emphasizing the imperious tilt of her chin. Tall, her carriage erect, her blonde hair impeccably arranged, her feelings showed only in her voice.

"What else do you want me to say, dear?"

"Nothing," she said, and turning to Jenks, "Will you please take me back to the house?"

Woodruff took her arm. "Please, Dorothy, let's not quarrel. Not tonight. I said I'm sorry. I'm sorry about everything, about being late, about missing my appointment. It just couldn't be helped. Didn't Dave tell you what happened at the laboratory?"

"I didn't," said Jenks, embarrassed. "Bancroft said to keep it quiet." To Dorothy he said, "It was really my fault, Miss Dykstra."

In spite of her control, her eyes were clearly filled with tears. "I know it was, Dr. Jenks," she said, softly. "It's never Woody's fault, no matter what it was. If Robert isn't around to take the blame, he finds someone else who will."

"But darling, you might give me a chance to explain . . ."

"It's a little late for explanations. My parents were so upset tonight they wouldn't come here with me. You know I don't mind your occasional lapses, but we're getting married Sunday. You might have had the decency to remember that. Instead the house is filed with hordes of people I detest, gamblers and touts and Wall Street spectulators—"

"But I'm a speculator myself, dear."

"You're also Clyde Woodruff, the third. You might spare my friends the necessity of mingling with these people!" She was pronouncing each word incisively now, her anger released. "Instead I find the place full of detectives and a mysterious scandal apparently under way. Your bodyguard —and you wouldn't need one if you stopped drinking—follows me around and when I order him off the place, you subject me to the humiliation of allowing him to remain!"

Jenks, his embarrassment more acute than before, had slowly gone out of the garage, leaving them alone. Woodruff said nothing for a full minute. His lips were tense, and a little ball of muscle showed in his jaw. "If you're

quite through," he said, "I'll take you back, now."

"You haven't answered me!"

"I'm not going to. The only kind of answer I'd give you now would get me slapped."

SHE hesitated for a fraction of an instant, then deliberately raised her hand and slapped Woodruff across the face—and simultaneously there was a brilliant blue-white flash of light!

Woodruff spun around. Standing on the stairway that led to the upper story of the garage was Ann Hunter, camera in hand. She started back up the stairs when Dorothy cried, "Come down here, you!"

Ann hesitated. Woodruff said, "Please come here, Miss Hunter." She started down the stairs slowly, folding her camera and removing the used flash-bulb, her expression non-committal.

"Who are you?" Dorothy demanded. "What were you doing there?"

Woodruff said, "Dorothy, this is Miss Hunter. Miss Hunter, Miss Dykstra, my fiancee. Miss Hunter's here to take pictures of our wedding for a magazine, *Life,* or *Look,* I think. I arranged for her to—"

"*You* arranged?" Dorothy said acidly. "Really, Woody, this is too much. You might have had the common decency to ask *me* about it. As for you, Miss whatever your name is, I suppose decency is too much to expect from one of your kind—"

"Please, Dorothy, Miss Hunter is a guest here."

"Indeed! Are you defending her too? Are you telling me that I must allow your guests to pry into my personal affairs—to come sneaking around and taking pictures of . . . of . . ."

"Of you slapping Mr. Woodruff?" Ann supllied. "Yes, I did get a shot of it. Should be a beauty. But you're mistaken about my prying, Miss whatever your name is. Robert said I could keep my equipment over the garage. Your voices were so loud I couldn't help overhearing."

"I suppose you couldn't help taking that picture, either?"

"Not if I want to get a really good set of pictures."

"Really, this is too much! Clyde, I demand that you destroy that picture and have this woman escorted off the premises!"

After an awkward moment of silence, Woodruff said, "Of course I'll attend to the picture, Dorothy, but I can't ask Miss Hunter to—"

"I've said all I'm going to say about it!" With this, Dorothy Dykstra turned and walked rapidly out of the garage.

"Dorothy! Wait a moment!" Woodruff called. He took a step after her, but she had already disappeared into the darkness. Woodruff stood there gloomily. He scratched his head and sighed.

"I'm sorry I caused you so much trouble, Mr. Woodruff."

"Well, there's no help for it now." He surveyed her with absent eyes. "I suppose I'd have done the same thing myself, in your place. But I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to destroy the picture."

"And leave the premises?"

"I . . . I'm afraid so."

"Funny," the girl said, thoughtfully.

"What is?"

"The way you keep using the word *afraid.* You're afraid this and afraid that. Yet all the time I keep thinking you're probably not the least bit afraid of anything. Or are you? I wonder. . . ."

"It's just a speaking habit, I guess."

"Maybe. Still, the psychologists say

our speech habits reveal a great deal about us. Ever go to a psychologist, Mr. Woodruff? You'd be a wonderful subject, I think."

"Why do you say that?"

"Oh, I don't know. Just a feeling. You seem so—so different from the man I thought you were when I first met you. Not that the change has been radical, but it's there. I feel it without quite knowing what it is, exactly, that I feel. But you've changed somehow."

Woodruff said, quietly, "There's an excellent reason for what you feel, Miss Hunter. You're very perceptive—almost intuitive. How do you think I've changed?"

She smiled. "You like to talk about yourself, don't you? Shows you're egocentric or something. Well, I suppose I'd better get my things together. Would you give me a hand?"

THEY both went upstairs. The blinds had been drawn and a light was burning. A table was piled high with cartons of flash-bulbs and there were several packages of differently sized film. Two more cameras lay on the table, ready for use. Close by were several shallow pans filled with clear liquid like water, but with a slight acidic odor. A red, shaded bulb had been screwed into one of the hanging sockets.

"Looks like you prepared a darkroom up here," said Woodruff.

"Sort of. I wanted to develop a few test shots to see where I was going. An assignment like this has to be hit right the first time—a Woodruff wedding generally comes along once a generation."

She began opening the camera she had used. "Well, here goes a shot that might have made photographic history: Dorothy Dykstra Slaps Woody Woodruff Forty Hours Before Their Fashionable Wedding. . . . I don't often get a chance to expose a film like this. Hold this, please."

"Wait a second," said Woodruff. He smiled to himself, then said, "Do you suppose you could develop the picture before you exposed it? I mean, I'd like to have it. Sort of a memento." He put the camera down. "I don't often get slapped, you know."

"Of course," Ann said, returning his smile. She busied herself a moment, then turned off the light and snapped on the red one. "May fog a little, but I need some light. The hell of it is I could have taken the shot without either of you knowing. I've a camera here that shoots with the new infra-red film—doesn't need a flash-bulb or any light at all, hardly."

"I almost wish you had."

"Used the infra-red, you mean? It needs preparation. I was up here when they brought your man Mahoney in. I had no idea it was going to develop into a rough and tumble, or I'd have gotten ready."

He watched her take out the film pack and drop the negative into one of the pans. She played it with a pair of tongs. "Would you mind letting the water run, Mr. Woodruff? I've a hose feeding from the faucet. There now, it's coming along." After a moment she said, "Why did you say you almost wished I had used the infra-red film?"

"I don't know, really. I don't like to get people into trouble with their bosses. This may be trouble for you, Miss Hunter?"

"More water, please. Trouble? My managing editor'll probably get to the bottom of it, and if Miss Dykstra writes him a letter—"

"What makes you say that?"

"Just a hunch—the way I size her up. She'll probably write an insulting

letter to *Look* and *Life* both. Right? You needn't answer. And then I suppose I'll run a good chance of getting fired. Stories like these are hard enough to arrange without silly female photographers spoiling them. Look out—this thing drips. Here we are . . ."

"Miss Hunter—"

"Yes?" She lifted the wet negative and turned on the light. "It is a beauty," she said, holding it up. Woodruff stood behind her and looked at it quizzically. "I don't suppose you can read a negative," she said. "Takes practice. If you've some time now, I'll be glad to give you a contact print with this crude apparatus I brought along."

"Sure," said Woodruff. "I've got plenty of time. You go to work and I'll come back with a couple of drinks. What'll it be?"

"Straight Scoth. We've got water here."

Woodruff went back to the main house. He went into the pantry and ran into Alonzo, who was sitting on a high stool, a bottle in his hand. "Mista Woody!" he cried out, his pleasant Filipino face tragic, "I look every place for you. Robert, he say I forget—"

Woodruff smiled. "It's all right, Lonz. You stay with that bottle and forget the rest of it." The pantry staff kept getting in his way trying to help. The noise was louder than ever; the party was in full swing. Doors kept opening and closing and half a dozen guests were puttering around the refrigerator while the cooks kept yelling about the food that was to be found at the buffet tables.

As Woodruff was about to leave, Robert came running in ponderously. "Mr. Woody, Professor Jenks wants you! He's been searching for you since you left the garage. I'll take you to him."

"No, you won't," said Woodruff. "Don't tell him you saw me."

WHEN he returned to the upper story of the garage, Ann said, "I think your friend the professor is looking for you. I heard him come in downstairs and call your name."

"You didn't answer?"

"No. I was afraid you might not get back. With the drink, I mean," she added. "Curious thing about the picture. There's someone in the background. I imagined I saw it in the negative, but it's quite plain here. What do you think of it?"

Woodruff looked at the small, wet sheet of paper. "It's a wow of a shot," he said, wryly. There he was, his back arching a little as the blow caught him flush across the face. Dorothy's face was half-hidden by the angle, but what showed of it was alive with anger. By contrast, his own expression seemed quite calm, his eyes fixed on her. "Did I really look like that?" he asked.

"At that moment, anyway. You had a distinctly different look on you before and after; I didn't like it. But what about the silent observer here in the background? Does it look like two men to you?" She added, as Woodruff studied the print, "Pity the red light fogged a bit. It looks to me like a peeper or two; that white spot looks like a huge, glaring eye."

Woodruff handed Ann the drink he had poured. He filled a glass with water and both drank. "Feels good," he said. "About this—one of them looks somewhat like Jenks. He went out just about then, I think. Embarrassed him, especially since this whole mess was his doing."

"You mean he wasn't really covering up for you?"

Woodruff hesitated, pouring another round. "I shouldn't have said that. Things are going on around here, as

you may have guessed if you heard Mahoney and those F.B.I. men." He touched glasses with her. "But if it isn't Jenks, my guess is that it's a couple of Miss Dykstra's blue-blooded friends feasting on a juicy bit of gossip. Would you care to know what I think of them, Miss Hunter?"

Ann smiled pleasantly. "Not that I don't enjoy your company, Mr. Woodruff, but I'd rather not. It really isn't any of my business." She began gathering up her things. "It strikes me I've been a little too personal already. You've been very kind."

"I suppose you're right. My fault. See here!" he said suddenly. "What are you doing?"

"I'm packing, Mr. Woodruff. Remember?"

"Nothing of the sort. You've already given me the negative, and that's enough. I'm not going to get you fired. You stay here."

She stopped packing her camera and let her hands fall to her side. "You're letting yourself in for more trouble than it's worth," she said.

"I'm afraid I am—dammit—I'm not afraid I am! Anyway, I want you to stay. You're a good photographer. I like your pictures. I may be a little high but I know what I'm doing. You just go on about your business."

"I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Woodruff."

"By having the next dance with me, Miss Hunter."

"Thank you, but no. I'm here to work. And besides. . . ."

"Besides what?"

"It wouldn't be wise, would it?"

"I'm afraid you're right." He put his glass down. "I said it again, didn't I?" he laughed. "Well, so long for now. Stay out of trouble, Miss Hunter. And out of Miss Dykstra's way, if you can."

She laughed with him and her blue eyes sparkled. "I can and I intend to, Mr. Woodruff. And thanks again."

WOODRUFF wandered back to the house again. He pushed his way through crowds wherever he went, watching them have a good time. He seemed to be preoccupied. Finally he ended by returning to the veranda, where he ran into Ray Vanness and a gang that had decided to practice choir singing; they were doing a solemn version of *Home On The Range*. Vanness disengaged himself from the singing long enough to say something about Woodruff's lateness for their lunch appointment.

"Thanks for taking the check, old boy," he mumbled affectionately. "And thanks for the swell party. Swell party —did I tell you? And thanks for taking that check. Got to have lunch again with you soon."

"Sure," said Woodruff, going away. He wasn't walking any too steadily—there were too many drinks in him for that, but he kept on wandering about aimlessly. Once he was invited by a group to drink a toast to the host, and he drank. It was immediately after that that he returned to the pantry. Alonzo was sitting on the floor, in a corner. His face brightened as he saw Woodruff. "Lonz, have you seen Mahoney?" Woodruff asked. "Or Robert? I want to see a familiar face."

"I am familiar face, Mista Woody," Alonzo beamed, waving his almost empty bottle. "Sit here with me. Wait for more faces to come."

Woodruff broke open a new bottle and sat down with Alonzo behind a barricade of empty soda boxes. The bottle was half gone and the Bataan peninsula battle thoroughly discussed before Robert appeared in the pantry again. Ann Hunter was with him. She waved, raised her camera and took a shot of

Woodruff and Alonzo in the barricaded corner.

"Hey!" Woodruff shouted after her retreating form. "Come back!"

"Work to be done!" she laughed.

"Mr. Woody," said Robert, anxiously, "have you seen Professor Jenks yet?"

"No. Where's Mahoney? Got to see Mahoney." He regarded Robert carefully, then pronounced, "You been drinking, Robert. Shame on you! Faultless butler caught stinko. Sit down and wait for Mahoney."

"The guests keep forcing liquor on me, sir. And Mr. Mahoney was with Professor Jenks, the last I saw of him. May I take you there? Or will you wait here until I bring the professor?"

"Both," said Woodruff. "I'll do both, and I'm the man can do it. I got friends can help me be in two places at once. More. Five places." He laughed, then stopped speaking abruptly. "Okay. I wait."

"Hurry, fat Robert!" Alonzo cried cheerfully. "I wait, too!"

When Robert returned a few minutes later, bringing Jenks with him, Woodruff was busy helping Alonzo blow his nose. Alonzo was wailing, his face tear-stained, "So sorry I forget to write in memorandum. Sorry . . ."

Jenks shoved the boxes to one side. He grasped Woodruff's hands and hauled him to his feet. "Woody!" he said, sharply, "You've got to pull yourself together. I must talk to you! Robert, brew some black coffee and bring it to the private library. Knock before you come in."

Still holding him, Jenks guided Woodruff to the library. Woodruff sank into a chair, blinking at Jenks affectionately. How strange Jenks looked. The paleness of his face was accentuated by a large blue vein that pulsated visibly on his forehead.

"Woody, I've got to tell you this because you've a right to know. I've thought about telling you ever since I found out." His voice had quieted to a whisper. "I told you I didn't know what so large an amount of the compound might do to you. When I went home, I looked through our earlier notes, because I had remembered. I prayed I was wrong . . . but I wasn't. Woody, you've got to tell me what's been happening to you—what you feel—what you think about. . . ."

Woodruff stirred in his chair. "What I think about?" he repeated. "The same things, I guess. Nothing more or less. And nothing's been happening to me. What makes you think anything has?"

"Because something must . . . because the truth is the amount you took is going to kill you!"

WOODRUFF stared at him. Presently, he said, "You're sure?"

Jenks covered his face with his hands for a moment. "Yes," he said, brokenly. "If nothing's happened to you—if you've felt nothing strange, then the only answer is that the concentrate was too strong to accomplish its initial purpose. It hasn't changed you. If it had, we would have a chance. We could combat its manifestations while we hoped to find an antidote. But as it is, the drug in you is slowly eating you, sapping your will and strength. Instead of weakening parts of you, it is weakening your body entirely . . ."

Jenks stopped speaking and looked carefully at Woodruff. Then he said, deliberately, "You're lying to me, Woody! You *have* changed!"

Woodruff said nothing while he lit a cigarette. He drew a long drag. "That's a strange thing to say, Dave," he said, frowning. "Do I seem different to you? Am I a different Woody from

the one you've always known? What makes you say I've changed?"

"I can't place it," Jenks said slowly. "I don't know *how* you've changed, but it's there. I know it. I sense it!"

Woodruff's frown deepened. He was about to say something when there was a knock on the door and Robert came in with a tray. "Never mind the coffee, Robert," Woodruff said. "I'm quite sober now." He waited until the door had closed before he said, "You know, Dave, I've never heard you speak like this. You're the kind of scientist who never uses words like *sensing* anything. You're—"

"Stop it!" Jenks said, hoarsely. "Don't you understand that I'm trying to tell you your life is hanging in the balance?"

"But what if it has changed me?"

"Then you must tell me. It's our one hope now."

"If I've changed then I won't die, after all?"

Jenks just stood there, looking at him. Finally he turned away and said, very quietly, "I don't know what's going to happen to you now. I can't understand you. . . ."

Woodruff got up and went to him. He took Jenks' arm. "I'm sorry, Dave. It's just that what you've told me is such a . . . a shock to me that I don't know how to react. What does a man say when he's told he's going to die? I don't know what to say. I've never thought of dying. I'm . . . I'm rather young for a thing like that." He was standing at the fireplace now, and he said, quite calmly. "How long do you think it'll be?"

"I don't know. Not long."

"Then there's—"

Suddenly the door had burst open and Mahoney rushed in, Robert at his feet, trying to stop him. "Boss, they're at it again!" Mahoney cried. "I tell you there's something screwy going on here. I just saw that Miller with the dame again and she keeps calling him Mulheimer."

"Listen, Mahoney," Woodruff began. "I haven't the—"

"I know what you think but if you'll just come with me I'll prove it! That guy of Bancroft's is in on it! You've got to come with me!" He stood there, breathing heavily, tortured by Woodruff's indecision. "Dammit!" he cried. "Have I ever tipped you wrong?"

A moment later, Woodruff had followed him out of the room.

Mahoney led the way around the back of the house and across one of the lawns. He knew his way like a cat. He ran along a gravel path toward one of the bath houses, leaving it when they were a hundred yards short. In the moonless night the sky was a dusty velvet robe. The sounds that echoed from the house, from many corners of the grounds, seemed unreal here in the stillness. The surf roared against the rocks near them with a sound like someone hushing them.

Then the ornate spire of a small covered pavilion, set on a high point overlooking the beach, rose before them, faintly silhouetted against the stars. Mahoney and Woodruff crept along toward it. They could hear three voices in hushed conversation.

". . . you like to have them know you're Hans Mulheimer, Mr. Miller?"

"No," said a man's voice. "But you're asking something—"

"Something you can deliver," said a woman's voice. "Something you've got on you, no doubt, or hidden away within easy reach."

"I haven't, I tell you!"

"All right, then," said the first voice. "We'll meet your price. I tell you we can't wait for the Sunday appointment."

"I don't know what you're—"

"Shhh!" Silence. Then, "There's someone hiding there!"

SUDDENLY a light! It stabbed out from the pavilion and caught Woodruff full in its beam. The next instant there was a heavy sound, the sound of flesh meeting flesh. Someone groaned and the light fell crashing to the wooden floor and began rolling. A woman screamed and her voice was suddenly muffled. A hand reached down for the light and snapped it off.

Then Mahoney's voice. "Shut up, the both of you, or you'll go out like that light." And the least bit louder: "Okay, boss, I got it under control."

But Woodruff, overcoming the first moment of bewilderment, had already started for the pavilion. He clambered up, half groping in the darkness. Mahoney struck a match. The flickering light revealed Jenks' assistant, Miller, and a young woman. Near Mahoney's feet, a man lay on the floor. "Sneaked up like an Indian, huh, boss?" Mahoney said. "I'd—"

"Look out!" Even as he cried the warning, Woodruff sprang. The last split instant of light, as the match went out, had revealed the prone man's movement and the dull gleam of a revolver as he slid it out of a pocket, and then the man had started rising from the floor.

Woodruff's shoulders smashed into the man's middle and hurled him back to the floor. His arms encircled Woodruff and both fell together, crashing headlong into a pair of benches, rolling over while Woodruff pounded his fists into the man's face. Mahoney came in with a rush. The man lashed out a foot and caught Mahoney in the belly. Mahoney went down with a choking gasp. But as the man had kicked, Woodruff swung his body about and fell on the man's out-stretched hand. He caught the revolver firmly between his knees. He brought his hands up. . . .

* * *

"STOP it," I said. "I call for identification."

I looked about me at the three men in the room with me. Two of them had been elsewhere in the house, but they had returned to this room when *Woodruff* had gone out with Mahoney. Had they, as I had, also felt that some climactic point was near? The struggle in which we had been silent accomplices as well as witnesses had affected each of us greatly. It emphasized how closely bound together we were.

But had I called a halt too late? Or too quickly? The elimination of the first *Woodruff* was a thing to be desired for its own sake, but it was just as important to eliminate these others. If I had been late with my call—but that was impossible; I had, after all, been the one to make the call. At worst, even if these men had arrived at the same conclusion, I had beaten them to it by a moment or two.

But what if I had called too soon? What if the things that were apparent to me were still mysteries to them? What if my analysis was too premature for them? For there was no such thing as objective correctness among us: it was the majority opinion that would be correct. And perhaps I had not given that majority opinion time enough to reach my conclusion. . . .

I realized then how dangerous a course I had taken, and I resolved not to risk it again. It hardly occurred to me that I might have been voted wrong, for if they did not agree with me, they could hardly have pieced together enough evidence to substantiate any

other view. If they did not agree with me, the odds greatly favored a split opinion. And if that happened I had lost time, for the first *Woodruff* would then go to the end of the line.

Because I had called, I wrote my identification first. I scribbled it on a bridge score-pad and tossed sheets of paper to the others.

He had been clever, that first *Woodruff*. There had been no clues in his actions to the very last. My identification of him had been the result of careful reasoning from the *lack* of clues. At no time had he done anything I might not have done. Indeed, watching him, hearing him talk, had frightened me, so perfectly was he Woodruff, the real.

But it was more than that. It was not only that he, living and breathing and being Woodruff to even those who had known him for years, had seemed so terribly real—but that we in the room had seemed, to ourselves and to each other, so horribly unreal. For, in that strange way that we knew things, we knew that so long as our compact held, we were like shadows. We were nothings, waiting for a chance to exist. We had no need of food or drink. We could not tire. We needed no sleep. Here in this room we would exist like substanceless beings, as divorced from the world of the living as if we had long been buried.

And now even our meager view of that world had ceased, shut off from the moment I made the call to identify. The very meaning of time had changed where it concerned us. However long it would now take us to reach some decision, between the time we had last seen *Woodruff* and the time our decision would affect, to the outer world that time would be an infinitesimal fraction of a second. The continuity of *Woodruff's* existence and his actions would be unbroken.

It was useless even to think of science in a matter like this. Perhaps that was what lay behind Jenks' questions. Had he really *sensed* the difference, as he had said? The word must have been repugnant to him, for he was a scientist even in his thoughts, but perhaps even he had felt there was no other word for what he felt. But why had *Woodruff* so steadfastly refused to tell Jenks what had happened to him? It had been a strange conversation from the beginning. *Woodruff's* fear had vanished the moment Jenks told him that only some evidence of change would indicate there was no fear of death—for *Woodruff* himself was at that moment the most complete evidence that the change had occurred. And evidently, for his own reasons, with the fear gone, Woodruff had decided to keep the story to himself, and his reasons seemed clear enough.

I would have told Jenks. I had reason to tell him. The others could only lose by it. Still, it had been strange. Or did it only seem that way because I had seen it through the eyes of a Woodruff who was not, after all, the real me?

THE identifications had all been written. One of the three opened them. He laid them down on the desk.

"We all agree," he said.

I nodded. It was over for the first *Woodruff*. We had all understood the lack of clues. He had lied, but so did every man—so would the real Woodruff lie, and I damn well knew it. It proved nothing; it revealed nothing of the essential character of the man. The first *Woodruff* had not been a man whose life was built on falsehood. And though he had said foolish things and behaved foolishly, he had not been essentially a fool. Cowardly? He ac-

cepted the consequences of his actions with deadly calm. Even the first mention of death, when Jenks had spoken to him, had not shaken the structure of his character. And few men morally or intellectually cowards would have shown such unthinking, instantaneous physical courage as he had, hurling himself at the man Mahoney had knocked down.

The four identifications agreed: *Killer.*

The ability to kill was a thing a man carried within him. It was a thing hidden from the world, often from himself. Even those closest to him might never know until the fatal moment came. To the world such a man might be anything, liar, coward and fool included, but that he was potentially a killer—that they could never know until he had shown it.

The killer was not a man. He was a deadly potential.

It was a realization to make any man shudder. I make no bones about the effect it had on me. I had always had a temper; I had seldom shown it. The world was my oyster. It went smoothly enough. But what, I thought, if I hadn't been born into money—money, that oiled the machinery of life until even a bad temper was a strange luxury? I had my answer, and it was a horrible one.

When I broke my musing and looked about the room again, I saw that there were only two men left with me.

The second *Clyde Woodruff* had gone.

CHAPTER IV

Three Agree

HE BROUGHT his hands up to the man's throat. He dug his fingers in deep, crushing the man's windpipe, feeling the flesh quiver under the pressure of his hands. Again and again the woman screamed. Woodruff relentlessly held his grip while the man thrashed about, his breathing a harsh, rattling sound.

Mahoney crawled back, the breath still knocked out of him, and he tried to unseat Woodruff. "Boss," he groaned, "let go—you're killing him!" Woodruff shook him off, his hands constricted around the man's throat. Mahoney swung himself back, butting savagely with his head.

That was when three dark figures came running into the pavilion. A flashlight told the story at a glance. One of the men grabbed Woodruff and toppled him. The second clamped a hand over the screaming woman's mouth. The third, in answer to Mahoney's cry, took after Miller, who had vaulted the wall and disappeared.

Swiftly, the entire group was hustled down to the bath-house along the dark shores of the beach. Behind drawn shades the lights were turned up. "Here's the gun he pulled," said Mahoney. He was standing with Woodruff, both of them disheveled and battered. The woman was sobbing hysterically. The man Woodruff had fought was slumped in a cloth chair in a corner, holding his throat and trying to catch his breath.

Bancroft took the gun from Mahoney and went to the man who owned it. He ran his hands through the man's pockets. He took out a wallet, flipped it open. There was an F.B.I. badge pinned to it. Bancroft's face clouded.

The door swung open and the other of Bancroft's men came in, his gun stuck in Miller's back. "Miller. . . ." Bancroft said, softly, then, to Mahoney, he said, "Tell me what happened out there."

Mahoney told the story quickly,

passing over the fight. The woman cried, "Tell him he tried to kill him! Tell him, why don't you!"

Woodruff said, "She means me. I guess I did try to kill him. I must have been out of my mind."

"It doesn't matter," said Bancroft shortly. "You don't know who you're dealing with. They'd just as soon have killed you." He broke open the gun Mahoney had given him. "These shells . . ." he began to say, but he stopped in confusion. He looked up, frowning, and indicating Miller, said to one of his men, "Frisk him."

The F.B.I. man went through Miller's clothes swiftly. From one of his pockets he took out a flat packet of papers, wrapped in oilskin.

Suddenly Miller, who until now had been silent with fear, found his voice, "You can't do this to me!" he cried. "You can't make a case against me by planting papers on me! Those papers aren't mine! They were never in my pocket!"

"What are you talking about?" said Bancroft. He stood before the trembling man. "Who put these papers in your pocket?" But Miller, now that he had spoken, fell silent again, his eyes traveling from one to the other, his breath coming short and uneven. Bancroft opened the packet and went through the papers, and after a few moments, he motioned Woodruff to him. "Take a look at these, Mr. Woodruff," he said. "They look like the stuff, all right."

Woodruff examined the papers. They were covered with figures and chemical symbols, thin sheets completely covered with fine writing. At the bottom of the third page there was a short note. It said: ". . . *care must be taken with the fourth distillate, and above all with the residue of the compound—high volatility. When preparing explosive . . .*" He read no further.

"Mr. Bancroft," he said, "I don't think these are the notes."

"What makes you think so?" said Bancroft, his amazement growing.

"I can't go into it now, but if you'll send for Professor Jenks, I'm sure he'll bear me out. I think there's evidence here to show that someone wanted us to *think* Miller had the notes."

BANCROFT nodded. "Joe," he said to one of his men. "Bring Professor Jenks here." He stood there silently a few moments, lost in thought, absently playing with his fingers as if he were counting something on them. Finally he turned to Miller and said, civilly, "Your real name is Hans Mulheimer, isn't it? You needn't be afraid to answer. This man here was impersonating the F.B.I. Mr. Woodruff will tell you we're the real thing. I think I understand what you've been through, Mr. Miller, but you've got to tell us exactly what happened. If you can help us, we'll help you."

Miller said, "You don't think I'm a Nazi spy?"

"We have no reason to think so."

"But he . . . he said so." Miller pointed to the man whom Woodruff had fought. He seemed slow in understanding what Bancroft had told him. "He said the F.B.I. knew my name was Mulheimer, that he was going to arrest me as a Nazi spy unless I . . . I . . ."

"Unless what? Begin at the beginning and give us the details."

"I couldn't understand him. . . ." Miller said, slowly. "I was dancing with this lady when it began. She called me Hans Mulheimer. I was frightened. I had changed my name a long time ago. I have a mother and two brothers in Germany—I didn't want the German agents here to bother me. It happened to friends of mine

. . . they were forced to give money . . . they were threatened . . . I was afraid if I were known as a German I couldn't get work. I'm a chemical engineer . . ."

"I understand. What about this woman?"

"I went outside with her. She took me to this man. He showed me his badge. He said the F.B.I. knew all about me. He said that if I wanted to stay out of prison to do everything this woman told me. She took me to the beach. She said she knew I had stolen Professor Jenks' notes and that I would have to return them."

"Yes?"

"But I hadn't stolen the notes. I hadn't stolen anything! And when I told her that, she seemed satisfied. She said she would stay with me for the rest of the evening, and we went back to the house."

Bancroft said, "Tell me, Mr. Miller —while you were on the beach with her, did you hear any commotion—any sounds that might have been, say, fighting? Try to remember very carefully."

"Yes, I remember it distinctly. It happened shortly after we got to the beach. It was a few hundred feet behind us. It sounded like a serious fight, but this man with the badge came to us and said that some drunks were brawling. He told us to go back to the house, and that he would want to see me later."

Bancroft said, somewhat absently, "Those drunks must have been you, Mahoney."

"Sure," Mahoney said, sarcastically, "me getting drunk—a guy that never monkeys with anything stronger than orange juice. What they heard was those jerk men of yours grabbing me from behind."

"Anyway, it ties together," said Bancroft. "You followed Miller and this woman to the beach and then accidentally got your trails crossed and followed Miss Dykstra and the professor instead." He turned to Miller and asked, "Then what happened?"

"We were at the house together until half an hour ago, then this lady took me out to the pavilion. She started calling me Mulheimer again and saying I was in serious trouble. I couldn't understand it. Then this man with the badge came back and they stopped. About ten minutes later they started in all over again, saying all kinds of things—"

"You mean," said Bancroft, "things like they would meet your price? And the Sunday appointment? Did you understand that?"

"No," said Miller, bewildered. "They hadn't mentioned those things before. I hadn't heard a word about money or a Sunday appointment until that moment. That's what Mr. Mahoney overheard."

"Thank you, Mr. Miller," said Bancroft. "You've cleared things up very handsomely."

HE WENT over to where the man sat in the cloth chair. The man kept looking at the floor. Bancroft took hold of his hair and yanked his head up. "Where's Harrison?" he said. The man said nothing. Bancroft slapped him hard across the face. "What did you do to Harrison?" he demanded.

The man said, "You've got nothing on me." He looked into Bancroft's hard eyes. "You can beat my brains out," he said. "I won't talk."

Bancroft stepped away from him. He motioned Mahoney and Woodruff to follow him. The three men went into an adjoining room, keeping the door between the two rooms open. Bancroft held out his hand, showing them the



"Yes," said Jenkins, "these are the papers. Thanks very much."

shells he had taken from the man's gun. Mahoney picked one up, then another, until he had examined them all.

"Blank cartridges!" said Mahoney, puzzled.

"Phonies," Bancroft nodded. "Fake —like the rest of this business. Like the notes you said were fakes, Mr. Woodruff. Someone wanted us to think they were the real notes. This whole affair has been a blind alley, carefully planned and executed."

"I don't see it," said Woodruff. "How could they possibly hope to make us believe they were the real notes? It would take Jenks half a minute to decide the truth. And what about the rest of it?"

"The notes are the only wrong thing in it . . . but maybe they were playing for time. Maybe they hoped the notes would confuse us long enough for them to carry out some plan. Maybe we're too late already." His face was grim as he added, "We're too late about one thing—one of my men, Harrison, is missing."

"Tom Harrison?" asked Mahoney.

"Yes," said Bancroft. "He was assigned to follow Miller. When you first came up with the story about Mulheimer, I checked. I've got Greeley at the main gate and the men call in every half hour to him to report; it keeps us from being seen together too often. Well, Greeley said Harrison had called in and hadn't said a word about Miller and any woman. But the man who called wasn't Harrison—that's obvious now. They got rid of Harrison somewhere and got one of their own men to call in, keeping us from finding out.

"The rest of it follows from there. They planned to have you, Mahoney, overhear enough of the conversation between the woman and Miller to follow them."

"What?" said Mahoney, astonished. "Where do you get that?"

"Because the woman called him Mulheimer only on the two occasions when she knew that you were following. First, the time they led you to the beach—as soon as you were stopped from following, they called it off. Then they laid low as long as you, evidently, didn't follow Miller again—"

"I got a terrific calling down," said Mahoney. "I was practically fired. No, that was okay with me, boss. I didn't mind—you were in a fix yourself with Miss Dykstra. But after awhile I couldn't help following them again. I didn't like the way it looked."

"It was designed that way," said Bancroft. "They wanted you to follow again, and you did. They obligingly led you to the pavilion and stayed there long enough for you to bring someone back with you, and the instant they spotted you, they went into that song and dance with poor Miller. Naturally, he didn't understand what they meant by offering him a price and a Sunday appointment—that was meant for your ears.

"All they had on Miller was some harmless information that he had once changed his name. He was frightened by it, especially when a badge was flashed on him, the same badge that was used on you, Mahoney. And that was enough to hook Miller into serving their plan. The notes were obviously planted on him while he was in the pavilion."

Bancroft nodded sullenly. "Even the gun was kept harmless. They wanted no trouble. I don't suppose they reckoned on being caught so soon. They under - estimated Mahoney . . . and your temper, Mr. Woodruff."

"But where does it all lead?" said Woodruff.

"I don't know . . . yet. So far we've played the game according to

their schedule. We've been fooled according to plan and done everything they wanted us to do. But maybe—"

THE door to the other room opened and the man Bancroft had sent for Jenks came in. He ran into the adjoining room, out of breath. "We can't find Jenks anywhere!" he said. "Nobody's seen him for half an hour or more. And there's hell to pay all over the place: Ryerson picked up three men who were carrying counterfeit F.B.I. badges, and the way it looks there may be plenty more around here!"

Bancroft snapped, "This is it, but we're one step ahead of them! They've gotten Professor Jenks out of the way to keep us from finding out the notes are fakes!" He faced Woodruff. "You're sure they *are* fakes, Mr. Woodruff?"

"Positive!"

"All right then, we'll play their game. We'll act as if we still thought we had the real notes—we'll close the case! We'll hustle Miller and the others to the can and give them enough leeway to tip us—"

"But what about Jenks?"

Bancroft said grimly, "I don't know, Mr. Woodruff, but we're in this for higher stakes than a man's life, than any—"

"I don't give a damn about any man's life!" Woodruff cried. "My friend Jenks isn't a professional hunter like your men are! You got him mixed up in this game of yours—you're supposed to protect him, not use him as bait! Game my foot! If you want to play games, play them with your men's lives, not with . . ."

The outer door had opened as Woodruff spoke, and David Jenks came in, pushing past the man Bancroft had left outside. He walked in quickly, surveying the rooms and the people there, his face puzzled as he saw the way his entrance was received.

"What's the matter?" he said. "What's going on here? Robert said some of Mr. Bancroft's men wanted me."

"Dave!" Woodruff cried in relief. "Where have you been?"

"Where? Surely there's no mystery about that? I've been with Dorothy. The poor girl's crying her heart out. Really, Woody, don't you think you ought to try to explain things to her? Instead of that, you keep flitting about— What's going on here anyway?"

"Mr. Bancroft, give me those notes, please," said Woodruff. He took the packet and gave it to Jenks.

Jenks took the packet and unfolded it. He steadied his hands as he slowly scanned the pages, then he looked up and said, "Where did you get these?"

Bancroft said, "They've discovered we're following your assistants and they tried to get us on a false trail, probably so's they could get at the man they really want. They planted these fake notes—"

"Fake notes?" said Jenks, looking from Bancroft to Woodruff, his face pale. "But they're not faked at all! These are the real notes!"

"But Mr. Woodruff said—"

"Dave," said Woodruff, anxiously, "are you sure? Have you seen this note here?" He fumbled through the pages and pointed. "They've got to be fakes, Dave—it doesn't make sense otherwise!"

JENKS looked at them curiously. "I don't understand," he said. "Woody, I know what you're trying to tell me, but these are the real notes. They're part of the last pages." He kept staring at them. "Why doesn't somebody

say something?" he asked. "What's the matter?"

Bancroft said, quietly, "Are all the notes there, Professor?"

"I can't be sure offhand. I think so."

"All right," said Bancroft. "That ends it. If you don't know, nobody does. There's another answer to this somewhere, and it's got to be a better one than the one I figured out." He took the notes from Jenks and re-folded them carefully. "If you don't mind, Professor," he said, "I think they'll be safer with me."

But he stood there musing, and he laughed to himself. "That's one of the dangers of this business, Mr. Woodruff —you get so used to making hypotheses to keep you going that you can build a theory around any set of circumstances. You thought these notes were fakes and I found a theory—and all the time the truth was a much easier theory to work out. I could just as easily have decided that Mahoney had really stumbled on the main clue. . . . Assuming that Miller really—"

"Miller!" said Jenks, turning involuntarily toward the other room. "Not Miller . . . it doesn't seem possible!"

Bancroft nodded. "Or Hans Mulheimer, if you prefer. He kept the notes where they'd least be looked for —on his person. Naturally he denied owning them, claiming they were planted on him. Unfortunately for him, he took no chances, not even after these agents had gone to the trouble of removing Harrison so's they could get to him. How could he be certain they were the agents he was expecting Sunday? And why should he believe the plans had been changed? He knew we were here—he might have suspected some sort of trap. So he played dumb, figuring he could wait a little . . . but Mahoney was nosing around."

There was chagrin in his laughter. "See how *this* theory fits the case? Perfectly. The other didn't—not after Professor Jenks showed up here, safe and sound. And now, gentlemen, if you'll excuse me, we still have a few details to clear up, for instance, the whereabouts of Tom Harrison. They couldn't have gotten him off the grounds."

Woodruff stood there dumbly. The turn of events seemed to have stunned him. "Mr. Bancroft," he said, "I don't mean to sound unfeeling, especially after what I said to you, but I must ask you to remember—"

Bancroft waved a hand. "I understand, Mr. Woodruff," he said, ironically. "You don't want any fuss. Well, there won't be any if we can help it, but a man's life may be at stake. We've a little interviewing to do with some men who like to carry badges. Be seeing you."

He returned to the other room, leaving Jenks with Woodruff and Mahoney. Woodruff stood there, shaking his head. "Funny the way it worked out, Dave," he said.

"I still don't know much more than when I came in," said Jenks. "Tell me what happened here, but I think you'd better go over and see Dorothy before she packs up and leaves." He looked at Woodruff earnestly. "Woody, what's the matter with you? Aren't you feeling well?"

Woodruff took Jenks by the arm and led him out of the bath-house without so much as a sidewise glance at what was going on with Bancroft and the others. They started back to the house.

"Dave," Woodruff said, presently, "I've got something to tell you. I should have told you before, but somehow I couldn't. Now that this whole horrible mess is finished. . . ."

"What is it?" said Jenks, quietly.

"Tell me, Woody."

Woodruff seemed to be searching for words. "I don't know where to begin." He held Jenks arm tightly and both men stopped walking. In the darkness, Woodruff could hear his own breath coming more swiftly. "You remember you asked me what had happened to me? You wanted to know if I had changed. I said no, then, Dave, but the truth is . . ."

* * *

I WASN'T sure which of the three of us had first called the halt; it happened so close together that it was possible it was simultaneous. But however it happened, one thing seemed certain—the second one who had been *Clyde Woodruff* was finished. Our unanimity was proof of that. The case seemed cut and dried.

In spite of myself, however, I felt a tiny thrill of fear as we each wrote our opinions. One could never be sure. We had stopped *Woodruff* at a dangerous juncture.

One by one we turned up our sheets. They agreed: *Fool.*

For he was a fool, to be thinking of telling David Jenks the truth of the predicament that was personal to him. Not because he wasn't the real—real in the sense that I knew I was the only real one—Woodruff; the others in the room with me would hardly have agreed with me in identifying him as a fool for that. In their minds they were each determined to be the *real,* in the sense of *final,* Clyde Woodruff.

No, it wasn't that. Actually, from his limited point of view, *Clyde Woodruff* had acted cleverly. He had almost beaten me to the punch. I had determined long before to tell Jenks the truth the first chance I got. If it had been a wise decision for me, why not for him? He could have told Jenks everything I would have told him—begged Jenks to help him. And who knows what would have happened? We in the room were not alive, but *Woodruff* was . . . and what if Jenks had been able to do something to give *Woodruff* final and irrevocable life?

It was a clever move, as I say, and I had decided to make that move myself *—but I would not have done it then!* It was the time he chose to speak that branded him as the Fool! But for that we might never have been able to identify him until it was too late, until the sudden move had beaten us for good.

But too much had happened for any but a fool to have tried telling Jenks the truth then. I don't think I have to explain. You see what I mean, don't you?

It was my turn now . . .

CHAPTER V

From the Sea

"WHAT'S the matter with you, Woody? What were you saying?"

"I have changed, Dave," I said.

"In what way?"

"In many ways. I feel different."

Impatiently, Jenks said, "But how, Woody? You started to tell me something but you're not saying a thing. You've got to give me details, even the most minute ones!"

"I—I don't think you quite understood me," I said. "It isn't what you think, Dave. I don't feel—well, the kind of evil you said I'd feel. And I haven't changed in the way you implied when we spoke in the library a while ago."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I'm sorry, Dave. I wish I could put it better, but I can't. I just feel a sort of newness, as if I were seeing

things for the first time. It's a sort of release, somehow. Maybe it's because this whole mess with Miller and the others has been hanging over me. Now I suddenly feel as if I had stepped newborn into the world."

"Is that all you have to tell me?" he said, despairingly.

"Yes," I said.

We started walking to the house again. I could understand how he felt. For a moment it had seemed to him that his fears had come true, and that they were to be admitted. Now he was back to that miserable state where he could only guess, where fear was greater precisely because he didn't know whether there was any reason for it. Though there was reason enough from what he had said. I fought the impulse to tell him everything, to break down and . . .

No, that wasn't the way. Trusted friend though he was, I had to keep silent now that I had determined my course. I wondered, in an oddly detached way, whether his suffering were greater than mine. Sometimes a doctor suffered more than his patient; it might be an intellectual kind of pain, but it could be deeper if only that a doctor could understand what the pain meant, and where it might lead. . . . And yet, I thought, was the word *suffer* the right one?

For I had told him the truth—I did feel a release. In spite of the urgency, in spite of everything, I felt almost happy. I felt alive again! Beside that simple fact, everything seemed relatively unimportant. It was with difficulty that I remembered the invisible ties that bound me to a world of shadows. It seemed to me that now I was . . . *alive* again . . . that nothing could possibly happen to change the world again, to thrust me back to the shadows. . . .

The world had changed. Everything I saw was different somehow. This was no longer the world I had seen through another's eyes, felt through another's senses. This was my world, my personal world. When I looked at David Jenks, catching a glimpse of his worn, haggard face in the darkness, he seemed like a different person to me. Even my memories seemed different. I thought of what had happened at the pavilion and it seemed remote, and the people like figures in a book read long ago. Bancroft, for instance, seemed even to have *spoken* differently. There had been a joviality about him, a broad feeling for humor. It had disappeared. Was it because the disastrous turn of events had choked off the humor in him? And Mahoney too had changed, though he was a man who had seldom let the outside world affect the inner Mahoney.

Jenks broke into my thoughts abruptly. "You'll find Dorothy in her rooms," he said. "I'll be here if you want me,"

He sat down on the veranda and I went into the house. The party had reached the first stages of stupor. One of the bands was resting, and in its place a string orchestra played soft dance music, but the floor was no longer crowded. Tired, aimless snatches of conversation flitted by; in one corner two men were arguing about Alsab's chances at the Preakness. Robert, weary but still efficient, presided over the bartenders. I made my way up the stairs through the couples who sat there.

THERE was no answer when I knocked on Dorothy's door. I pushed the door open and found her sitting in a chair near one of the windows. Her room was dark, and her figure softly outlined by the faint light of the late-rising quarter-moon. She

turned her head slightly when she heard me come in, then she turned away again.

I sat down on a hassock beside her. In the moonlight she looked as cool and beautiful as if she had been carved out of marble. I thought back to the first time I had seen her; it was at a reception at one of my aunt's, and I had counted the afternoon wasted until I saw her coming across the lawn, escorted by half a dozen men. It took me weeks to get her to spend an evening with me, and the gossip columns had spoiled it by conjecturing how much money this latest romance was going to cost me.

The gossip columns had played the dominant role in our relationship ever since. They had broken our engagement by revealing I had lent her father money for investments I chose for him; for she wore her pride like armor, and its one weakness was the mention of money; her father had lost almost everything when Wall Street laid its famous egg. How many times since then, for one reason or another, had our engagement been broken? Thinking so, and looking at her, I felt that she too had in an almost imperceptible way undergone a change.

"Dorothy," I said, "I'm sorry about tonight. I wanted to tell you the truth earlier, but I couldn't. I didn't want you to feel—"

"It's all right, Woody. Dr. Jenks told me everything."

"Then you do understand?"

"Perfectly." She turned to me and asked, "What was the answer you didn't want to give me—the one you said would get you slapped?"

"I don't remember," I said. "I was angry. I might have been thinking of saying anything. It doesn't matter."

Presently she said, "How many times have I heard you say 'it doesn't matter'? Sometimes I wonder if anything matters between us."

I knew what she wanted me to say. I had said that too, many times before. But somehow I didn't say it. There were too many things going on in my head. "You're tired, dear," I said. "I'll leave you now. . . ."

I didn't finish what I was saying. There were tears glistening on her face. She sat there, crying, making no sound. I took her in my arms. "Woody," she sobbed, "you do love me, don't you? Tell me you do."

I brushed her tears away with a handkerchief. "That's a fine question to ask a groom two days before his wedding," I said. She put her arms around me and held me tightly to her. I felt her breath against my throat, and the perfume of her body was heady and sweet.

"Good night, Woody," she whispered.

When I went downstairs I didn't know what I wanted to do. Jenks was out on the veranda, but I was in no mood to talk to him. I felt exhausted, but my head was teeming with a thousand thoughts. If only I could solve the endless riddles that surrounded me . . . if I could sit down somewhere and think. But I couldn't. There was no beginning and no ending. All my life I had been surrounded. In the end I made the same decision I had made so many times before. I went for a drink.

AT THE bar, Robert said, "Miss Hunter has been asking for you, sir. She's dancing with Mr. Vanness over there."

How many drinks had I had that night? I had been drinking all day—I had been drunk several times already, but I was developing a magnificent tolerance for alcohol. I wondered whether one day I might wake up and find little red veins on my face. I said

to Robert, "No, not the Scotch. It's stopped affecting me."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Robert. "That hasn't happened for two or three weeks at least. May I suggest champagne and brandy?"

"And fix me something to eat," I said, and I remembered what he had said about Miss Hunter. I looked out on the floor. She was there with Ray Vanness. They were the only couple on the floor at the moment. She looked wonderful, I thought. When the number ended, I waved to her and got her attention, and she and Vanness started towards me. They had looked very well dancing together, but they walked unsteadily, laughing with each other. "You've been drinking," I said to her.

"Not at all," she laughed. "Nothing but a few sips of something Robert—oh, look!—he's making you one, too. Robert, one for me, please, and Mr. Vanness." She added, "Makes one conspicuous not to drink around here, and I hate being conspic—conshpic—Isn't that the funniest thing? I just said it right and now I can't!" And she was off in another fit of laughter.

"What about your work?" I asked her.

"All work and no play makes Ann a dull girl."

"How is it coming? Did you get any good pictures?"

"You know what she does?" Vanness said loudly. "She's got a new kind of camera. Takes pictures in the dark. Imagine anything so—"

"Shush," said Ann. "It's a secret. Makes people self-conscious to know there's a camera watching them."

"I'll say it does!" Vanness laughed. "Almost started a riot on the lawn when . . ." He stopped sheepishly, putting his index finger over his mouth. "Forgot. That's another secret. Well, Woody, old friend, how about having lunch with me one of these days?"

Robert said gravely, as he brought up a tray, "I'll book you at the earliest opportunity, Mr. Vanness." We drank, toasting Timoshenko, and Vanness went off into a speech about it, and while he was speaking I signaled Ann. She nodded.

"Excuse me a moment, gentlemen," she said, holding up two fingers in the V sign. "V for victory, and other things."

"For Vanness," said Vanness, brightly.

And for veranda, I thought, as she left. "Robert," I said, "did you ever hear of mass production?" I took the champagne bottle and poured two tumblers of brandy into it. "For a sick friend," I said to Vanness. "You wait here for Miss Hunter."

I went out to the veranda and Mahoney was there, talking to Ann. He stopped when he saw me. Ann said, cheerfully, "Well, thank you so much, Mr. Mahoney. I'll be sure to send you a picture." Mahoney waved to me and started to leave.

"Come back here," I said to him. He stopped. "What's going on here? Who do you think you're kidding?" I looked at both of them and I said, "Something's cooking here. What is it, Mahoney?"

He looked at her. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean," she said to me. "Don't tell me you brought a bottle without glasses."

"Well, Mahoney?" I said.

"I'm sorry, Miss Hunter," Mahoney mumbled. "I think the boss ought to know regardless." He scowled. "Somebody went upstairs over the garage and wrecked Miss Hunter's stuff."

"What? Who wrecked what?" It didn't make sense to me.

"It's nothing," said Ann. "Someone must have stumbled up there by mis-

take and fallen on my things. It's so dark here, and well, it didn't amount to anything at all. Really it didn't."

"The hell it didn't," said Mahoney, fiercely. "If you ask me, they knew just what they were doing. It looked like somebody was looking for something. All the packages opened up, even the cases, and the trays spilled all over the floor. That was no accident, boss."

"Thanks, Mahoney," I said. I didn't know what to make of it. Why should anyone have wanted to search the store-room? And what could they have been looking for? "Have you seen Bancroft around?" I asked.

"He's around, all right," said Mahoney. "He's laying low. Had a talk with his men. Seems the guys they found here with those phony badges were all wearing white carnations—sort of a private badge for themselves. He found two more that way. It's just like I told him. The place was lousy with guys with badges."

SOMETHING clicked in my mind. I put a hand in my pocket, half afraid that I wouldn't find it there. But is was there; it had to be. I waited until Mahoney had left, then I took out the print Ann had made earlier that evening. We stood near the door where there was some light and I held the picture up.

I was right. The figures in the background were two men. One of them had his back to the camera; that seemed fairly plain. But there was an unmistakable white spot over his shoulder. Ann was watching me and I showed her the picture. "Look at that spot," I said. "Could that be a white carnation?"

She studied it. "It might be. But if it is, there were two men out there because we can see the back of one of them, and the carnation wouldn't show unless there was another man facing him and the camera." She said, after a moment, "If it was Professor Jenks out there, he would know, wouldn't he?"

I nodded. Yes, I thought, Jenks would know. But where was he? He had said he would be on the veranda, but there was no sign of him.

"Is it important?" she asked.

"I think it is," I said. "I think it's the answer to who went through your things. There was someone outside the garage who was afraid you had gotten him in the picture."

"No," said Ann. "If this person wanted the picture destroyed, why did he wait so long? He could have come up while you were gone to get me a drink. I was alone, developing the negative. He could easily have spoiled it by pretending to turn on a light accidentally, if it didn't want more desperate measures."

"You're missing the point," I said. "The picture didn't mean a thing to him until Bancroft discovered that all these men were wearing white carnations! When he found that out, he remembered the picture and the possibility that he was in it. And that's when he decided to go after it!" But when I looked at her, I saw that of course she didn't understand what I was talking about.

"This mysterious business of the white carnations doesn't make much sense to me," she said. "Not that I'm anxious to find out. Just the same, my feeling is that the explanation is much more simple."

"I think you know something," I said, slowly.

"Nothing at all," she said, seriously, then grabbing my hand, she added, "Except that here comes Mr. Vanness, looking for someone!"

We ran down the stairs to the lawn

and lost ourselves in the garden. After a moment I said to her, "Robert said you were looking for me."

"That was when I first discovered what had happened up there," she said. "I was a bit excited about it, I guess, and then I decided you had too many troubles of your own without taking on mine."

"So you don't want to see me?"

"I didn't say that."

I said, "I wish I could see the expression on your face."

"I'll show it to you," she said, stepping out from under the tree into the pale moonlight. "I was smiling, as I recall it."

"Shall we go for a walk?" I said.

"It might do my head some good," she said. "It's spinning a bit."

So we walked, and we had been walking for five minutes when Ann said, "Walking in circles isn't helping my head in the least."

I looked about us and saw that we must have made a tour of the flower beds several times. "I brought some headache remedy with me," I said. "If you don't mind drinking from a bottle."

"But I've a glass!" she smiled, holding up a brandy glass. "Snatched it from the veranda railing on the dead run, what's more."

So we toasted MacArthur, and she said, "I don't want to make any speeches, but you seem terribly tired and over-wrought. I'm not complaining, understand, but maybe you'd like to be alone with whatever thoughts were making you walk in circles."

"I'm not sure I want to be left alone with them. Is that what you meant by that remark about my troubles?"

"I'm talking out of turn again. I must be good and drunk."

WE WERE walking along the path that led to the beach. The paving blocks of the path shone with a dull lustre, and the moonlight caught droplets of dew on the grass. The night seemed very quiet then.

I said, "A few hours ago you wouldn't even dance with me, and now you're walking arm in arm with me in the moonlight." I mimicked her. "I'm not complaining, understand, but I'm glad you changed your mind."

"Maybe it's because you've changed, too."

"Have I? In what way?"

"There you go again!" she laughed. "You just can't be teased. The moment we mention you and your personality, off you fly. I don't remember the last time I met anyone so preoccupied with himself."

I said nothing, and she said, "Is that why you drink so much?"

"Is what why I drink so much?"

"Because you're all mixed up inside?"

"Maybe. I don't think about it as much as you imagine."

We walked on without speaking until we came to the beach. The surf was running along the shore in long, phosphorescent combers, and the sand was pleasant underfoot. The bathhouses stood huddled together as if from fear of the sea, and a pier, thin and exploratory, stretched from them until it was lost in the black waters. In the basin, boats rose gently with the swell.

We went on to where the shore formed a slight peninsula. There were rocks that rose from the hard-packed beach, outlined against the gray sand, and we sat down there and looked at the sea. A breeze had come in, moving the warm, moist atmosphere, running through Ann's hair. The moonlight that had turned the gold cloth of her gown to silver lay in her eyes like deep, molten pools.

"You're not happy, are you?" she said. "Not deep inside you."

It was strange, her talking to me that way. I remembered the definiteness with which she had discouraged my first attempts to become friendly with her. She had kept a cool balance, plainly telling me she had no interest in my personal affairs. And yet, for minutes past, she had spoken of little else. She had been drinking, but that alone could not possibly explain it. Something had happened that had broken down her reserve, but it was more than that; the interest she showed in me perplexed me.

"You haven't answered me," she said.

I answered her then. I didn't care why she was talking to me. I wanted to talk to someone—to her; and the words came pouring out of me. I hadn't thought I was unhappy; a few short hours before I had felt quite the opposite. But as I spoke to her, I said things that I hadn't realized I felt. I spoke about all kinds of things, irrelevant little stories. I told her that I hated Seaside. She looked at me oddly and she asked me why, and when I tried to tell her, I couldn't because the thought was so new, because I hadn't known, before that moment, that I felt that way about it.

"I'll tell you why," she said. "I know why, because I hate it, too. It's a lovely place, but it doesn't belong to anyone. It's a monument to everything that's wasteful and meaningless. Lives, for instance . . . your life, in particular. This place stands for everything you hate—for your fiancee's friends, whom you can't stomach, and for the people you call your own friends, whom you bring out here because you hate the others so much. But they don't help. You care for them as little as they care for you. . . .

"But it isn't only this place—it's the same wherever you are. Your only friends are Mahoney and Robert, and you pay them just as you pay your other friends, one way or another. You're a lonely guy, Woody, and that's why you drink. And deep down inside, you're all mixed up, and I don't think you like Woody Woodruff when you catch sight of him. I don't think you like him at all. . . ."

A LONG time passed. We sat there and once or twice we drank, but there was no talking. I suppose she felt she had said too much after all, and there was nothing I could have said, not then. It was so quiet I could hear my watch ticking. Thin drifts of clouds had blown in, hiding the moon for long intervals that were pitch dark.

"Woody!"

"Yes?"

"Do you see it? There—look! I thought I was imagining it."

I thought I saw it, but I waited for the moon to come out again. It was a long, low boat, coming in towards the beach. It was moving very slowly. When it was closer I saw that it was a cruiser, with a cabin so low-slung that I hadn't noticed it before. There was no sound of a motor.

"Is it one of your boats?" Ann whispered.

For an instant something gleamed. It had been a wet oar, raised a bit too far, catching the light. A cabin cruiser—being rowed in toward shore! Surely it took several men to row such a boat. But what was it doing here, and why was it so secretive? It had no running lights. I tried to remember the ruling the Coast Guard had made about pleasure craft in these waters. It was violating every peace-time maritime law as well as the war regulations.

"Get back against the rocks," I whispered. "Don't move."

When the boat was no more than thirty yards offshore, it stopped. A faint light flashed from it toward the shore. After a few minutes, the light winked again, twice in rapid succession.

"Can you see the basin and pier from here?"

"Yes," she breathed. "What are you going to do?"

"Never mind. Keep looking. Tell me if you see anything."

I kept my eyes glued to the boat while I stripped. That boat had come to keep a rendezvous and it wasn't difficult to guess with whom. The boat signaled again, riding just beyond the point where the waves gathered to break, and when the moon showed again, there were several figures standing in the bow.

Ann grabbed my arm. I turned in time to see a tiny blue light blinking at the the foot of the pier. Someone was standing there. The boat started moving again, parallel to the shore, heading for the basin. I pressed Ann's hand. "No matter what, you stay put," I told her. When I looked into her eyes, there was bewilderment there, but no fear.

I waited for the moment when the first bath-house would come between the boat and its view of the beach. Then, keeping low, I sprinted for the water. It was like ice. I held my breath and came up twenty yards out. I started swimming breast-stroke, careful not to break water.

Just as the boat reached the pier, it swung about and came up along the outside edge of the pier. The maneuver had shielded it from sight of anyone between the pier and the main house, while its access to the sea remained unimpaired. At the same time, it had ruined my best chance of coming up to the pier unobserved.

Someone came walking quickly down the pier. It was now or never. I came a little closer, as much as I dared, and ducked under. I swam under-water until I felt my temples would burst, but before I came up, I rolled over and stuck my nose out. Before I came up, my forehead hit something and I went under again. I felt the side of the boat —I had bumped it coming up. If I had made much noise, they would be watching the water. I hadn't had time to catch a breath. I was beginning to lose my sense of direction. Still feeling the boat, I dove down as deep as I could. When I came up, I felt the starboard side of the boat. I was under the pier. There was no sound.

PRESENTLY a voice said, "Must have been the boat against the pier. Let's get on with our arrangements."

A throaty, guttural voice answered, "I tell you again I have no authority to make any arrangements. You were supposed to have him now."

"Can't you understand what I'm telling you? They've rounded up most of our people. They're guarding him very carefully."

There was a momentary hesitation, then the second voice said, "This I do not understand. Why they should be guarding *him?* How do they know we are after *him?*"

"They're watching everybody now. The only—"

"But you must make him understand that the plans must be changed! We cannot wait for Sunday now!" The voice grew angrier. "I have ten good men here. We make an attack on the house and we take him!"

"How far do you think you'll get with him?"

"Far enough, my friend. One of our submarines comes tonight for fuel. He

could be on his way to the Fatherland in—"

"Impossible!" the first voice snapped. "We can't risk it. By the time you return tomorrow, we'll have him and the rest of the notes."

Again the hesitation. "Notes?"

"My last word to you is to return tomorrow at the same time. That's an order!"

"So?" the second voice growled. "An order, my friend? You'll hear about this. We'll see who gives the orders."

"Good night. Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler."

I heard the man's retreating footsteps on the pier. I grabbed the piling and began pulling myself toward the beach. The boat was casting off. The guttural voice, in subdued anger, "An order, he said! For us the dirty work, the games with the Coast Guard on a moonlight night, to come here. An order! Pull away there. Careful, Paul. . . ."

I was still several feet from the end of the pier when the man left it. I couldn't follow immediately without running the risk of being seen by the men in the boat. But I did get a look at the man who had been on the pier; he turned left and started back to the main house. He was a tall, heavily built man in evening clothes, blonde haired. I looked under the pier to see how far away the boat was. I had had to keep my mouth muscles taut to keep my teeth from chattering. The icy waters had penetrated my bones, it seemed to me.

In the end, coldness won out over caution. I left the water sooner than I should have and started running along the beach after him. I might have lost him entirely if he hadn't heard me coming; I was breathing like an engine, and he spun around. Maybe the sight of me, dripping wet and half-naked, startled him, for instead of running he just stood there a moment, and then he suddenly, belatedly, clutched his left shoulder under his jacket.

I hit him in that position. I dove in and grabbed his knees and we both went tumbling over in the sand. He whipped an arm free and smashed a fist into my face. The blow stunned me sufficiently for him to scramble to his feet. He pulled a gun out of a shoulder holster and stopped. "Mr. Woodruff!" he exclaimed. "What in the name of . . ." He pulled a badge out of a pocket. "You don't understand!" he said. "I'm here with Mr. Bancroft!"

I tried to look confused. I needed about thirty seconds more.

"I didn't know who you were," I gasped.

"You mean you were—you must have been under the pier. I—" He must have been warned by some false move of mine, for he spun around just before Ann got to him. She had circled around behind us and come up from the direction of the house. In her right hand she held the champagne bottle, ready to bring it down on his head. He swung his left arm up and smashed the bottle out of her hand, and in that instant, I grabbed his right arm, swung him back into position and brought my first down between his nose and one of his eyes.

It was a magnificent punch. He went down as if he'd been hit by a sledge-hammer, and he lay there on the beach without another movement. I bent over and picked up his gun. "We're a good team," I said to Ann, surprised at my own coolness. She mumbled something and I grabbed her. I thought she was going to faint. I picked up the champagne bottle and opened it. I was holding it to her lips when they came running.

BANCROFT was the first of the four to get to us. He stopped short and looked at me in sheer amazement. "Good God!" he shouted. "What the hell have you done here, Woodruff?"

"Just take him to the house," I said. "Here's one you missed, and there's a nice story goes with it."

"Are you crazy?" Bancroft shouted. "This man is Steve Holmes! He's one of my best man. What the hell do you mean—"

"You're sure?"

"Am I sure? Of course I'm sure! You've gone out of your mind!"

"Then it's better than I bargained for," I said. "I overheard a little conversation that may interest you. I was under the pier when—"

"Under the pier?" Bancroft roared. For the first time he seemed to notice that I was soaked through and standing in a pair of pants. "So that's it, damn your hide! You were under the pier and you heard Holmes talking to those men in the boat!" He stood there, shivering with rage. "Well, listen to this, Mr. Woodruff—I sent him out on that pier!"

I looked down to where the other men were reviving Holmes. I tried to say something, but before I made a sound, Ann sighed, dropped the bottle, and passed out in my arms.

* * *

I WAS back in the study of my apartment. One of the two men I had left there was sitting in my chair. At the same time, I knew that at that moment there was a *Clyde Woodruff* on the beach at Seaside. I could see him trying to revive Ann Hunter. I could hear Bancroft still shouting furiously. . . .

"One of you called for identification," I said, confused. "That's why I'm back here. But what happened?"

"Seems obvious, doesn't it? Even if it hasn't happened until now. The other fellow thought he had you figured out, and he made the call. I couldn't agree with his identification—so here you are again, and according to our compact, you've now inherited the last position. So you'll have your chance again, you see."

I didn't know what to make of it. It seemed only natural to me that they hadn't been able to agree. They had had only two choices: deciding I was either a liar or a coward. How in the name of heaven could they have decided I was either? Was this impasse the stumbling block I had prayed for? Was it possible that whatever happened, there could never be agreement between these two on my identity, precisely because I was the real Clyde Woodruff?

Or was I interpreting a fantastically fortunate twist of circumstance in my own way? What was to prevent them from agreeing? I looked at the man who sat opposite me and I saw no such realization on his face. He sat there, calm and confident, smoking a cigarette. I wondered what had prompted the one who had been with him into making the identification. By what action, or sum of actions, had he judged me? And what had he judged me to be?

When I tried to ask him about it, the man ignored me. He was intent on the flow of events from where the fourth *Clyde Woodruff* had plunged—the *Clyde Woodruff* who was either a liar or a coward. What would he do with the facts that now were his—with the swift-shaping events that were now for him to control?

CHAPTER VI

Bancroft Sums It Up

"SHUT up!" Woodruff shouted at Bancroft. "Lend me a hand here."



Ann lifted the bottle high over her head and swung it down

Still white hot and grinding out oaths, Bancroft took hold of Ann's face and slapped it smartly. After the second slap she flinched and opened her eyes. Bancroft bent down to Holmes, who had regained consciousness.

Holmes sat up dizzily, shaking his head.

"Did you get the name?" Bancroft said, tensely.

"Get somebody on a phone," Holmes groaned. "Name *Odalisque* on her starboard, ten men hidden her cabin, armed and—"

"To hell with the boat! Did they mention any name?"

Holmes cried, "Listen to me! She's rigged like a fishing boat, false masts, heavily armed, speedy, nets and lobster pots—but she's part of a submarine supply gang! They mustn't lose her. . . ."

"Holy smoke!" Bancroft exclaimed softly. One of the men broke away and swiftly ran down the beach toward the house. Bancroft said, "Holmes, what about the name?"

"He didn't mention any names at all. Maybe he was leery of me. When I saw the kind of boat it was, I tried to get him to come back tomorrow night, in case the Coast Guard hadn't made it. He wanted to come out and take whoever they were after by force. I bluffed him with an order to come back tomorrow, but it's an even money bet his boss'll smell something funny. If the Guard doesn't get him, it's muffed."

"Why didn't you let them try coming to the house?"

Holmes shook his head. "They had tommy guns hidden under their nets in the bow . . . and there are five hundred people around here yet."

Bancroft brushed his face. "You're right. Anything else—any word at all that might be some kind of a lead?"

As Holmes rose unsteadily, Woodruff pressed forward. "There were at least two things that might be clues," he said. "I heard—"

"Thank you, Mr. Woodruff," Bancroft snapped. "Holmes here probably heard at least as much as you did. I'll take his version."

Holmes said, "The whole thing was screwy. We weren't talking about the same things. He kept waiting for me to talk . . ." He stopped and said, "I need a drink. My head's buzzing from that wallop."

Bancroft muttered an oath as he and his men started back to the house. Woodruff, his teeth chattering, left behind with Ann, saw Mahoney come sprinting toward them. A few yards behind him, puffing valiantly and lugging a blanket, was Robert, calling, "Wait for me, Mr. Mahoney!"

Mahoney came to a dead stop and looked at Woodruff, amazed. "Then it's true what I heard about you being under the pier?" he exclaimed.

Woodruff took the blanket from the panting Robert and wrapped it around himself. "Ann, are you all right now?"

"Mr. Woody, you're wet all through! You've got to—"

"Shut up, will you?" said Mahoney. "Boss, were you really under—"

"Shut up, the both of you!" said Woodruff. "Ann, are you okay?"

She nodded her head and smiled wryly. "I guess so."

"You were wonderful," Woodruff said. "That's a small word for it."

"Maybe if I'd been less wonderful," she said, "there'd have been less trouble. And you weren't so bad yourself."

"Mr. Woody, I must insist that you get out of those wet clothes without any further delay," said Robert quietly, "or I shall take the necessary measures, much as I enjoy such a display of mutual admiration."

"All right," Woodruff sighed. "Let's

get back. Listen, Mahoney, do you know what all this is about? The pier business and all?"

"Sure I do. Bancroft called me in to help when he found out how many of them agents were hanging around. And anyway," he smiled broadly, "I kind of made myself useful. Seems they had trouble getting those babies to talk, and you know me, boss. I ain't a guy who likes to—"

"I know, I know," said Woodruff, wearily. "Get to the point."

"But that's the point! It started all over again, after they sent Miller or Mulheimer, whichever it is, back to the city under heavy guard. Bancroft is no dope, no matter what I thought previous. While he was trying to find his man Harrison, who is still missing, he kept on trying to find corroborating evidence against Miller. Well, since Bancroft got here tonight, every telephone wire in Seaside—incoming and outgoing—has been tapped.

"So what happened? Half an hour after he got his hands on Miller and the guy who had been in the pavilion with him, a call goes out of here to a drug store in the east eighties. A man says that the trick worked—"

"What trick?" said Woodruff, eagerly. "Do you mean that Miller was involved in a trick, after all—that he's really innnocent?"

"Yeah," said Mahoney, surprised. "How did you know?"

THEY were at the house now, having come around to the back entrance. "Just a minute," said Woodruff, turning to Ann. He took her a few steps away. "You'd better go up and get some sleep," he said quietly. "It's been a tough day for you. I just wanted to tell you once more that I think you're a grand sport, and thanks a million."

She looked steadily into his eyes, then she murmured, "Good night, Mr. Woodruff," and turning quickly away, she ran into the house.

Woodruff stared after her. After a moment, he said to Mahoney, "Come up to my room with me while I change. No, Robert, you needn't bother—I know where everything is. And thanks for the blanket." He went through the kitchen up the back stairs. There was a weary group of some eight or ten people sprawled on the stairs, with a bottle on each alternating step. When Woodruff and Mahoney started up, they yelled that it was a private party, then, seeing Woodruff in his blanket, they began giving Indian calls until the pantry staff came running to see what new troubles were about to descend on them.

When they got to his room, Woodruff said, "Keep talking."

"Sure, boss . . . you mind if I ask how you knew it was Miller?"

"I had a hunch about it. How did Bancroft find out?"

"Well, when this guy says the trick worked, the one in the drug store asks why he is being called, seeing that everything must be fine now. So the guy calling from here says that the F.B.I. is still all over the place hunting for Harrison, and it doesn't look as if they'll get a chance to contact their man on Sunday. At this point the guy in the drug store blows up and yells that they changed the Sunday plan the minute they found the F.B.I. was hep to them, and that what he has to do is get the man they want to fork over the dope right away.

"So the first guy says that this man is still playing cagey and he refuses to change the plan. He won't give the stuff up before Sunday. Not only that, but he won't let Harrison out from where he's got him hidden away, so's

the F.B.I. will pack up and get out. Then there's a long wait, and finally the guy in the drug store says, 'Get the man and have him ready for delivery at exactly 2:45 a.m. tonight.' They are going to get into Seaside the only place it ain't guarded—through the sea. He arranges how they will signal each other, and he hangs up."

Mahoney paused and said, "You going out again, boss?"

Woodruff put his shirt studs in. "Keep talking," he said.

"That's about all, I guess," said Mahoney. "Bancroft knew from that conversation that Miller couldn't have been the man they were talking about." He snapped his fingers. "And something else! Almost forgot to tell you the best part of it. When Bancroft hears what went on in that conversation, he goes to Professor Jenks and asks him to look at the notes again, to make sure they're really the real notes. And what do you supposed happened?"

"Professor Jenks changed his mind," said Woodruff, softly.

Mahoney looked at him with his mouth open. "I don't get it," he gulped. "That's exactly what happened! The professor went over the notes very carefully and he said he'd been wrong, and the notes were fakes. That put Bancroft back where he'd started, only worse off because he'd lost time." He scratched his head, adding, "Boss, it don't figure, you knowing everything Bancroft knows."

Woodruff nodded grimly, fixing his tie. "And maybe a couple of things Bancroft doesn't know," he said. "Tell me, Mahoney, when I met you on the veranda talking to Miss Hunter—about an hour and a half, maybe two, hours ago, and you told me her equipment had been wrecked—how much of this did you know then?"

"Just what I told you then. If I'd known more, I'd have told you the rest. All I knew was that Bancroft's men had rounded up a couple of the phony badge-carriers. While we were talking on the veranda, the professor was upstairs with Bancroft, going over the notes. I went in after you left and they invited me upstairs. Bancroft said they might need me, and would I agree to take orders? When I agreed, they told me everything I've just told you."

"You were there when they assigned Holmes to meet the boat?"

"Sure thing. That was a ticklish job they gave him. He was going out to meet that gang and try to get them to drop some kind of hint as to who they were expecting to take back with them. Meanwhile Bancroft had already notified the Coast Guard about the boat, but they weren't sure they could get there fast enough. There wasn't much time by then. All we can do now about that boat is hope the Coast Guard did pick them up later. And Holmes didn't get a thing . . . except a terrific black eye, from what I heard."

WOODRUFF had put on a fresh jacket. He paused at the light switch and said, "Do you know where Professor Jenks is now?"

"In his room, I suppose. He was feeling pretty sick before." He went out with Woodruff, saying, "I wanted to tell you the way I got one of those phonies to confide in me, but if you're in a hurry. . . ."

Woodruff stopped in the hallway and smiled. "No, Mahoney," he said, "I'm in no hurry. And I really want to hear it."

"Thanks, boss!" Mahoney beamed. "You see, when these guys on the phone arranged their lights signals, the one in the drug store—they couldn't get

anyone up there fast enough to grab him—anyway, he said that they would use the color they'd arranged. And Bancroft didn't know anything about a color, and he couldn't get the monkeys he'd rounded up to spill it. So I asked if I could have a chat with one of them, and I picked out a big, hefty son of a gun, cause the way I figure is like this: a little guy gets used to beatings, but a big guy who never has to take them is going to break down easier when he gets his lumps."

"So you gave him his lumps?"

"And he gave me the color," Mahoney admitted, with subdued pride. "It was blue. And the guy who gave it to me was the one who had been on the phone, so he should have known."

"Is that all?" Woodruff sighed.

"Ain't it enough?"

Woodruff sighed again and shook hands with Mahoney. "If you'll excuse me now, Mahoney, I'll tell you about the punch I landed on that poor fellow Holmes, sometime soon."

"Punch? I heard it was a bottle."

"That's what gave me the punch," said Woodruff, walking down the hallway to the adjoining wing.

There were lights showing under several of the doors in the wing, but except for subdued music from a few radios, the hall was quiet. Jenks was in a two room suite at the end of the hall. Woodruff stopped before it and listened. There was no sound. He knocked softly and Jenks called, "Who is it?" Woodruff answered, and a moment later, Jenks opened the door. "Come in, Woody," he said.

He was in pajamas, but his bed was untouched. On a table beside an easy chair stood a bottle of rum and a half filled glass. An ashtray beside it was choked with butts. A flat cloud of smoke lay suspended in midair. Woodruff sat down on the bed. Jenks looked horribly tired as he sank back into his chair.

"What's the matter?" said Woodruff. "Mahoney said you weren't feeling well. You look like hell."

Jenks cut a slice of lemon and dropped it into the rum. "I feel like hell," he said. He raised the glass and emptied it slowly, closing his eyes as he drank. He kept his eyes still closed as he said, "And this isn't helping much. I don't know why I'm drinking. Maybe it's because everyone here does . . . the place stinks with the smell. . . ."

"Would you rather I left?"

"Not at all. I can't sleep anyway. And you sort of looked as though you had something on your mind."

Woodruff smiled wryly. "I didn't think it showed. I wanted to ask you about the notes they found on Miller."

"You mean why I changed my mind about them?" He opened his eyes They were streaked with blood, and the lids hung heavily. "You won't like my answer any more than Bancroft did. I told him I changed my mind because the notes *were* fakes, though I didn't think so at first. Why? Maybe because they were such excellent fakes. Even when I re-examined them, I was struck by their similarity to the figures in the genuine notes. Or maybe," he added, "because I couldn't think straight about anything anymore. . . ."

Woodruff said nothing for a moment, then quietly, he observed, "That's no answer, Dave. Bancroft couldn't know the notes weren't genuine, because that little notation about explosives didn't mean anything to him. But I knew immediately, as you must have known. Your answer about the figures can't explain what must have gone on in your mind when you saw that notation."

JENKS filled his glass again. "It isn't always possible to explain what

goes on in one's mind," he said. When he finished filling the glass, he pushed it away. He lit a cigarette, watching the flame. "For instance," he said, "how would you explain your change of mind a few hours ago? When you refused to admit anything in the library, it might have been possible that there was nothing to admit. But later, when you started to speak—when you admitted you had changed, and in the next breath quickly turned the conversation aside, it was evident that you had changed your mind. Can you explain it?"

"What are you trying to say?"

"I've already said it: It isn't always possible to explain what is going on in one's mind."

Woodruff lit one of Jenks' cigarettes. He took a long, thoughtful drag. He said, "Do you want me to tell you now?"

"You have nothing to tell me now. I knew the answer from that moment on—the big answer, that is. I can't hope ever to know the details, and even if you told me, I could never be sure."

Woodruff seemed stunned by what Jenks said. Slowly he said, "You're trying to tell me something. What is it?"

Jenks let the question hang in silence. Presently he said, "Listen to me carefully. I told you that the amount of that damned concentrate you had taken would kill you unless something happened to you—unless you changed. But you know, and you've known all along, that it will kill you unless you can overcome its power to change you, unless you can be the final victor in the compact in which you must have entered, or you could not be here at all."

"Then you lied to me before?"

"No."

"But before you gave me a different reason."

"I don't think I gave it *you*."

Woodruff started so violently that the cigarette fell from his hand. He crushed it and lit another slowly, regaining his composure. "At any rate," he said, "you lied. You said then that it would kill me because it was sapping my will and strength. The truth is that it will kill me unless I am the final victor in the compact I entered. And you must have had a reason for lying then, as you must have a reason for now acknowledging that lie, however backhandedly you've done it. . . .

"And there are other questions I might ask. One: why should you tell *me* this now? Since you made a distinction in referring to my identity, why should you have chosen *me?* Why didn't you admit this an hour ago, or two hours ago, or at any time since I took the concentrate? Two: why should you give me so poor an explanation for your change of mind in identifying the notes Miller had planted on him? You must know that the explanation was worthless, yet you gave it without trying to hide its worthlessness . . ."

"You forget," said Jenks, "that while I am talking to you, I am also talking to Clyde Woodruff."

"You don't think I am Woodruff?"

"I have no way of knowing. If you are, I must hope that you understand. If you aren't, I still must hope that *he* understands."

"Understands what?"

"The answers to your questions."

Woodruff got up. "I am Woodruff," he said, "and I understand the answers to my questions. It's a simple answer. You're trying to confuse me. You're using what you know as an instrument against me." He smiled and said, softly, "But it won't work, Dave."

"It may," said Jenks, and he raised his glass to Woodruff as he left the room.

WOODRUFF went downstairs. Robert was supervising the cleaning. "I thought you were asleep, Mr. Woody," he said, yawning. "Mr. Bancroft wanted you a few minutes ago and I refused to wake you."

"Where is Bancroft?"

"In the private library. You wouldn't want me to fix you a bite to eat, would you, Mr. Woody? There's quite a mob in the kitchen."

"Nothing fancy; ham and eggs maybe. I'll be in in a little while."

Woodruff went to the back of the house. He knocked on the door of the library and went in. Bancroft was lying on a leather couch, his eyes half closed. He had his shoes off and only a small lamp was lit. He sat up as Woodruff came in. "Hello," he said, "I thought you were asleep. I wanted to have a word with you." He put his shoes on. "I trust you don't mind my using this room as a sort of emergency bedroom. The house is full up, your man Robert told me, and I have to be—"

"Perfectly all right," said Woodruff.

"What did you want?"

"It's about that pier business." He stopped, embarrassed. "I'm sorry I flew off the handle. You couldn't tell, Mahoney explained, because he'd told you about the phony badges. Anyway, I'm curious about those clues you thought you had. Holmes didn't seem to remember much of the conversation after that tussle."

"There were two things that struck me as odd," Woodruff replied. "First, the man on the boat seemed to assume that the man they're after wouldn't be watched. He said something like: 'Why should *he* be guarded?' That was in answer to Holmes saying that everyone was guarded."

"You're sure about that?"

Woodruff nodded. "Positive. He plainly felt that their man would not be guarded. Strange assumption, wasn't it?"

"I don't understand it, frankly."

"And the second clue," said Woodruff, "is stranger still. When Holmes said that he'd have both the man and the notes tomorrow night, this fellow on the boat questioned him. *Notes?* he said, as if that was something that took him rather by surprise."

"I'm glad you brought this up," said Bancroft. "Holmes mentioned this thing about the notes. I didn't know what to make of it; I thought maybe Holmes hadn't interpreted it correctly, but he said just what you say. Which makes matters even more confusing." He shook his head. "I confess, Mr. Woodruff, I've seldom come up against anything as muddled as this thing. I'll be damned if I know where I am."

Woodruff said, "I have some ideas, if you care to listen."

"By all means."

"Cigarette?" said Woodruff, opening a box. He lit both, then, leaning against a desk, he said, "I'll just ramble on for a few minutes. I think you'll get what I mean. . . .

"First, let's go back to the original clue. Professor Jenks gave you a strip of film with photographs of some of the notes on it, the assumption following that the notes were being photographed. That seems to me to have been an extremely troublesome procedure for someone who might easily have copied the notes. Or, assuming they were copied and then photographed, wasn't it a remarkable thing that the thief was carrying around copies of notes he already had? To say nothing of his amazing carelessness in having dropped such a film? Are you following?"

BANCROFT nodded. "I've thought about these things myself, Mr.

Woodruff," he said, "but you learn in this business that amazing things happen all the time. The amazing things must lead to a conclusion that is sound in spite of them."

"Fine," said Woodruff. "Another amazing thing about our thief: he received a business telephone call right in the laboratory. How could he dare take such a chance? What if he had seen Jenks in his private office—where would he have taken this urgent call? I would conclude from these circumstances that my friend, Professor Jenks, lied."

"Suppose he did lie? He lied about the notes we found on Miller. I showed them to Yarovitch, who's been Jenks' assistant longer than the rest, and he said they were good fakes and nothing more. I didn't say anything to the professor even then—not until we got more proof that Miller was innocent. Then, when I asked Jenks to look at the notes again, he changed his mind. Hell, *he* knew I understood he was lying, so now we all know. So where does it lead us?"

"Let's see," Bancroff pulled at his lip. "What if we assume that the man these spies were after tonight didn't need the notes at all? What if he knew the notes from memory? That would make a certain kind of sense. The spies had tried to get him to change the appointment. He was suspicious, or careful. The spies then decided to kidnap him—and we know that. Well, why should they kidnap him unless one of two things was true: either they thought he had the notes on his person, which is absurd; or they knew that he had the notes safely stowed in his mind."

"But Professor Jenks said the phone conversation he overheard definitely mentioned written notes to be delivered."

"Maybe he lied about that too."

"Then maybe he lied about the appointment altogether," said Bancroft. "We have to have something to go by to decide one way or another on any of these things."

Woodruff said, "If we assume that the man the spies intended to kidnap is Professor Jenks, the pier conversation adds up. He could have memorized five times as much, take my word for it; I've seen him memorize a textbook word for word. It also ties in with that other remark about having him guarded. You were guarding his four assistants, but Jenks himself was walking around free and easy. The spies wouldn't expect Jenks to be guarded."

Bancroft frowned. "And where would the Miller thing fit in?"

"It was staged to lead you up a blind alley, just as you said. Your first analysis of the thing was right, as I see it."

Bancroft got up and began pacing the floor. He rubber his chin thoughtfully, glancing once or twice at Woodruff, then he said, "Tell me, Mr. Woodruff, how good are you at memorization?"

"Pretty fair. Why."

"Fair enough to memorize notes like those we're talking about?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then why don't you fit every particular of the case you've just outlined against the professor? It is a case against him, isn't it?"

"You can't be serious."

"I'm giving you this straight, Mr. Woodruff. Matter of fact, I can give you a better case against you. Care to listen?"

"Sure."

"Okay. You've got a key to the laboratory. The man there that night was you. You were copying notes which you later had transferred on film. You know a girl who's here tonight who monkeys with cameras and things like film—"

"But I just met her tonight."

"I'm not contradicting you. So you had the notes put on film. Then it got hot, so you decided to destroy the films. I happen to know that this girl photographer was using your garage storeroom as a workshop, and that somebody ruined a lot of her stuff. It could have been you or her, or both of you. You got rid of the film and memorized the notes. That would make you a possible suspect in that conversation that Holmes had, because they might just as easily know that *you* carried the notes in your mind, as well as Professor Jenks. And just as it's true that we didn't have Jenks under guard—it's true that we didn't have *you* under guard."

WOODRUFF said, "Terrific, so far. Anything more?"

"Plenty. Suppose *you* and Mahoney, who is still your man, planted the fake notes on Miller. You could have gone into his background very easily and played that Mulheimer gag on him. Remember, it was your man Mahoney who first brought it up, who insisted the place was filled with phony F.B.I. badges. *You* could have hired all those men to gum up the works when you knew I would be here with my men. And it was *you* and Mahoney who actually caught Miller in the pavilion, which might also be classed as amazingly fortuitous."

"And why did I tell you the notes were fakes?"

"I'll get to that," said Bancroft. "Let's get on with this. When we tapped that call to Yorkville, and your men were caught, you went out to the beach, using the girl with you as a blind, making it look like a romantic interlude, if you'll excuse me for saying so. You went out there to warn the boat away. You swam out to head it off, but you missed it in the darkness, so you swam back under the pier, too late to warn them. Maybe you told them, after Holmes left, to watch out for the Coast Guard—they weren't caught. Then you went after Holmes, trying to get him out of the way before he could tell me the things that might incriminate you—the very clues you mentioned. And the girl helped you. . . . Hold on, I'm not done. . . .

"When we stopped you on the beach, you went back here with Mahoney and had a conference with him in your room. He told you that Professor Jenks had admitted the notes were fake, after first saying they were the real notes. So you went in to see Jenks, just a few minutes ago, and you found him half drunk, for very good reason. Maybe your talk with him convinced you that suspicion had finally come around to point at you, so down you came to talk to me.

"You told me things we already knew. Yes, Holmes told me both the things you did. You just wanted to check on it and then you saw how bad things were, so, to head me off, you tried to build up a case against your friend, Professor Jenks. This after Jenks had driven himself half crazy trying to protect you, after—"

"Me?" said Woodruff, quietly. "How do you figure that out?"

Bancroft smiled peculiarly. "It would explain some of the lies the professor told, when there seems to be no other explanation. You asked me why you branded the notes as fakes? Because you had drawn one trail with the Miller episode, and now you wanted to cross it, to throw everything into hopeless confusion. Did it occur to you that I might wonder how you could possibly know so quickly that they were fakes—or know anything about the notes? But if you had planted them,

naturally you would know.

"Then Professor Jenks came in. He already suspected you; probably he had suspected you from the start. He saw the notes and he knew they were fakes, but he didn't know that you had counted on him to say so. He was so confused by then that he thought the best thing he could do was to lie—so he said they were genuine. That confounded you, and you undertook something fantastic: you pointed out something and insisted the notes were fakes, as if you knew more about them than he did, which was true in that instance. But what could poor Jenks do? Could he reverse himself on your obvious coaching and give the game away? He cut the argument short and stuck to his guns.

"It was only later, after you had had ample opportunity to let him, one way or another, that it didn't matter if he identified the notes as phonies, that he admitted it. It must have relieved him to know that his innocent assistant wouldn't suffer for your crime. And right now he is hoping against hope that you'll return the notes before it's too late, before he has to turn against you."

WOODRUFF said, "And what about your missing man, Harrison?"

"He was in the way when you planned to trick Miller, so you . . . well, I don't think you killed him. It wouldn't be necessary. You could always hide him—this is a big place."

Woodruff blew his breath out. "That's it, is it?" he asked. He opened a drawer in his desk as Bancroft nodded, saying, "I gather this is the point where I pull a gun out of my desk and shout that you'll never take me alive?" He took out a carton of cigarettes and broke open a fresh pack.

"Wouldn't do you much good if you did," Bancroft smiled. "I took the cartridges out of the gun in the bottom drawer."

"Picked the lock, eh?" Woodruff laughed. He was sober in a moment. "I must admit, Mr. Bancroft, that you've built up an astonishing case against me. I'm almost ready to begin believing in it myself, except for the fact that you neglected to mention what possible motive I might have."

"I'm glad you brought that up. It puzzles me too. It can't be that you'd be after the money involved in a thing like this, and I can't see anything else either. A thing like this takes a man without a conscience, without a heart. The Professor doesn't fit in there either, to resume your case against him, but—assuming for a moment that he was after the money involved—why in the name of heaven should he have called in the F.B.I. in the first place?" He let that peculiar smile come over his red face as he said, innocently enough, "Because when all is said and done, Mr. Woodruff, he *did* call us in. You might have considered this most amazing fact of all your facts."

He pronounced the last word with a sharp little twist in it.

"A motive," Woodruff mused, ignoring him. "Where can we get a motive for something like this?"

"You think about it, Mr. Woodruff, and I'll think about it, and we'll confide in each other if we get any results. Because," he said, folding his hands together as he lay down on the couch, "when I get my motive, I'll get my man."

Woodruff paused at the door and turned back. "It just occurred to me to ask, Mr. Bancroft," he said, "how much of that hypothetical case against me you really believe in."

"You're not worried?"

"No, just interested."

"Well, then, suppose we say that I believe in nothing of the hypothetical case, but that I, too, am interested."

Woodruff said goodnight and went out. As he started for the kitchen, he saw someone turn down the hallway leading away from it. He called out and the man came back. Woodruff said, "You're one of Bancroft's men, aren't you?" He went on as the man hesitated, "Just a friendly word of warning. If, as I assume, you've been detailed to shadow me, stop right now. Because if I catch you, I'll beat your brains out, and not with a bottle either. Ask Holmes."

He continued on to the kitchen. Robert was sitting on a high stool before the stove, the skillet ready, the eggs waiting to be cracked. Perhaps ten people were milling about the kitchen, having a late snack, and Ann Hunter was among them. She was wearing flowered print pajamas and a robe, and she was devouring a plateful of dainty, crustless sandwiches and drinking milk out of a bottle.

"Hello," she said, her mouth full, and she reached out and prodded Robert. "Robert, crack the eggs. He's here."

Robert started. "Thank you; I must have dozed off. Ham and eggs, Mr. Woody, well done! Touch of Worchestershire? Coming up, sir!"

"What are you doing here in that get-up?" asked Woodruff.

"Can't sleep on an empty stomach, so down I came."

"Here, Robert," said Woodruff, pushing back his sleeves. "I'll help you. We can't allow Miss Hunter to eat that stuff." He snatched the plate of sandwiches away from her. "Ham and— on two!" he called.

WHILE he was frying the eggs, Ann lit a cigarette. He took it away from her, muttering something about women who smoked during meals. She broke out laughing at him. They gobbled the food down with only a minor incident to disturb them. One of the people in the kitchen opened a closet and Alonzo was inside, sitting on the floor. He shouted something in Spanish at the startled guest, then, catching sight of Woodruff, he suddenly burst into tears. "So sorry I forget," he blubbered. They could hear him still crying in the closet after Woodruff closed it again.

Ann kept laughing while she drank the milk. Woodruff gave her a straw and took another for himself, sharing the bottle. He looked at her and said, "Good girl. I was afraid you were going to say something about this not being the first bottle we've shared tonight."

"You wrong me. I knew *you* wouldn't," she said.

"I guess I've under-estimated you in more ways than that."

"Thank you," she said, fluttering her eyelids with mock demureness. All the same, there had been something in her voice as she spoke.

Little by little the kitchen emptied. Robert folded away his chef's cap and sleepily exchanged goodnights. Alonzo's crying stopped and was soon followed by soft, contented snoring. Occasional voices drifted in from other parts of the house, but slowly, silence was coming to Seaside. Between six and seven, between the late drinkers and the early tennis players, Seaside would enjoy its Saturday morning hour of rest.

When they had finished, Woodruff turned off the kitchen lights. They went out to the foyer. The front door was open, and the far horizon had the merest streak of pale blue across it. The house was quite dark now. Woodruff took

Ann's hand. "Don't go up just yet," he said. "You can't sleep on a full stomach." He led her out to the veranda, and she said nothing and offered no resistance.

They sat down on a large wicker swing. For several minutes neither of them spoke. A cool morning breeze swept across the veranda, and Ann gathered her robe about her. "You're shivering," Woodruff said, putting an arm around here. Then he said, quietly, "You're still shivering. You're not cold?"

"No," she said.

He raised her face to him, and held her in his arms. He kissed her tenderly. She was close to him now, her breathing uneven, her body limp. She had pressed him against her, but now she pulled away. He took her back in his arms, kissing her again, her lips, her cheeks, her forehead. She trembled and was quiet, and minutes went by, then she got up.

She said, "It's been a wonderful night, but I must go now." But he held her hands, drawing her down again. "No," she said, quietly.

"Why not?"

She looked down at him. "You shouldn't have kissed me."

"But I wanted to. I think I wanted to the first moment I saw you. What do you suppose it can be?"

"I don't know," she said, turning away. "It doesn't matter."

He stood beside her. But it does matter," he said. "It matters to me. I don't understand it."

Her eyes were dark bits of flame. "Woody, it isn't that I think we're doing something wrong. I'm not thinking of your wedding. I wouldn't let anything stop me . . . if I were sure we loved each other."

"Do you love me?"

"I couldn't sleep when I left you. I came downstairs again hoping I'd see you, hoping somehow that something like this would happen to me. I wanted you to kiss me, to hold me in your arms. And now that it's happened, I know it mustn't go any further. Because I love you, Woody, and I don't want to be hurt . . . ."

He stood there, seeing the tears run down her face, and suddenly, irresistably, he swept her into his arms again. "I love you, Ann," he whispered. "I don't know how or why. I don't know what will happen after tonight. My head's going round and round like a pinwheel and I can't think anymore. But I love you, Ann. . . ."

* * *

I DON'T know why I didn't stop it sooner. We both had identified him a good deal earlier, but we let him continue — at least I did, for my own part — because he was so interesting. I wanted to see how his mind worked, and where it would lead him. I had wondered, seeing how Ann Hunter had acted with him earlier that evening, what *Clyde Woodruff* would do when he met her again in the kitchen, but I had hardly expected this. I had watched him, a little frightened, certainly fascinated. In the end, it was the man with me who made the call for identification.

He was the liar. It had been clear enough from the moment he had begun to plan against David Jenks. On the basis of a few flimsy arguments he had undertaken something that would not only have smashed every semblance of his friendship with Jenks, but he had placed himself in an almost intolerable position. I could not understand what had motivated him—for surely he must have been aware of the enormous flaws Bancroft had found in his story, but whatever had motivated him, only a liar could have pretended to believe something so patently untrue.



"I guess I underestimated you," he said.

Was even that as vicious as the lie he had told Ann Hunter? For there was something about him that was utterly destructive. He had taken the life of Clyde Woodruff and dirtied it as badly as he could. He had not only placed himself under suspicion, but he had undertaken to break the heart of a girl who meant nothing to him. What kind of man would have done what he did?

And yet, was there not something of him in every liar? It was the liar who destroyed not only his life, but the lives of people around him. It was the liar who sullied everything he touched, eager only to satisfy himself, to provide new excitement for the dark workings of his mind. For I knew that I would never be able to understand him.

We had stopped him from hurting Ann, though it would be an almost impossible task to avoid it completely now. But what of Jenks and Bancroft? Bancroft had built an astonishing case against *Clyde Woodruff* true, but it was still a completely untrue one. The questions that *Woodruff* had asked, however, must still have had some weight when viewed in that light. Why had Jenks lied? What had actually gone on in the lab? What was the answer to the ever-growing riddle of what had happened in the laboratory? Where would it end?

More than ever, it was important *now* for me to take over my own life, for

now that we had eliminated three of us, I knew who the fourth man was. He was the coward, and that coward would now take over my life at the perilous juncture where it had stopped momentarily. And trembling at the thought of what might happen from now on, I saw the man with me had not yet left. He was still sitting near me, watching me. . . .

Surely he realized that I now knew who he was. But the mere knowledge was useless to me. Under the terms of our compact final victory belonged to the one who could bring the testimony of a third person to support him. *"Incontrovertible evidence will consist of the testimony of a third person, identifying him in agreement with the guesser."* That was how it had been stated. But to fulfill those terms, I would have to find a third person whom I could bring into this completely unbelievable world—bring him, moreover, with understanding enough not only to accept what had happened, but to agree with me.

The solution of this predicament had been left to the devices of the last two survivors. It was the most bitter irony of all, as of the ones who had gone before us had left us this as their heritage. *But as I thought so, I realized that a new factor had come into existence. . . .*

BOTH of us knew it, as we had known everything else that bound us. Now that we two alone survived—we had somehow regained an independence of each other! Where, before this, only the one who had been *Woodruff* at the time, had had life—now both of us were equal. Within the bounds of our compact, I had regained my freedom of action! Where before I could not have left this room unless a majority had agreed, now I could do whatever I wanted.

But only within the terms of our compact. I could not, for example, take over my life again. That was his right; I was forced to obey that. I could not leave the building where others might see me at a time when *Clyde Woodruff* was known to be elsewhere, where he was being seen by others. That was interference with the life that belonged to him.

But if he, as *Woodruff,* were to return to this apartment and bring others with him—those others would be able to see me, to talk to me, to wonder, perhaps, which one of us was Woodruff and which was this amazing double he had found. And though I had thought this to be true when it had first happened, I knew now that if someone had come into this room before we two were left as sole survivors, that we would have been unable to communicate with those people—that we would not have been seen by them! Had Jenks come into this room when I had first entered and found the four men, he would have seen only me. But my actions and my words would have been dictated by them.

That was the essential difference, the new factor that had come into existence —the fact that there were only two of us had given me an independent existence, a freedom of action, within limits.

It had had to be that way. How else could either of us have fulfilled the terms of the compact? If I were to have a chance at identifying the other survivor, I needed that freedom of action, little—so terribly little—as it was.

I returned the gaze of the coward. Why hadn't he gone? What was he waiting for? And then I laughed, realizing the answer. He was afraid to go —afraid, now that his chance at life had come, to take it! He squirmed

under my gaze. We understood each other perfectly.

"Why are you waiting?" I said.

"Nothing is lost," he answered. "There can be no confusion in time. Wherever he was, I will resume at precisely the point where we stopped him." He hadn't answered the question. He locked his fingers nervously and looked away from me. "You look worried," he said, hesitatingly. "You seem to be on edge, as if you begrudged me my turn."

"Begrudge you?" I repeated, bitterly. "I'd give anything if I had a chance to take your turn—to try to repair the monstrous things *he* did."

He looked up at me eagerly, trying to hide it. "Would you?" he said. "Does it really mean so much to you? Because I don't care one way or another—and if you want to go now, I agree."

"Your word on it?" I cried.

"Yes," he nodded.

And instantly, with that sudden electric swiftness that sometimes knifes through all uncertainy, through indecision, I realized that I had been given the instrument that would seal his doom! I understood why he had surrendered his turn. He was hanging on to the life that was still his, afraid to venture it lest I somehow find a way to destroy him. Remaining there, he thought, he was safe from me. However long this move might prolong his miserable life, he clutched at it, never considering the almost insuperable difficulties that would have faced me had he taken the turn. But now he was lost!

The plan I had conceived would see to that. I went to my desk, where most of this account, then unfinished, was lying, and I gathered up the sheets. He didn't understand what I was doing, but he watched me put the manuscript into an envelope. I was taking it with me, and he was powerless to stop me. . . .

* * *

TWO hours have passed since the event I have just written about occured. Two hours I returned to my life. I have done what I could for Ann Hunter. I have told her we will discuss our affairs tomorrow. And since then I have been writing this account, bringing it up to date.

For I am putting my hope of salvation in this manuscript. I am sending it to the one person who may understand it. That person is the editor of a magazine I frequently read for relaxation. I have never met him, but reading his editorial columns, I have come to understand his mind. Surely he will understand. Stories stranger than this are common-place to him, because he deals with them every day.

His name is Raymond A. Palmer. In Chicago he edits a magazine called *Fantastic Adventures*. He signs his columns as *Rap*.

To that magazine, then, I am sending this fantastic adventure. It is now early Saturday morning, and I have had to charter a special plane. Reading this—*this very note*—he must understand that he is my only hope. I expect him here in New York tonight or early tomorrow morning, Sunday. I am paying all his expenses.

When he comes, I will carefully discuss the whole thing with him. Once he is convinced of my identity—and there can be no doubt, for I will prove that all of it is true, the end will be in sight. He can verify anything in this manuscript by merely talking to the people involved. When he agrees that I am Clyde Woodruff, he will understand that the man in my apartment can only be the coward. We will go

there together. Then, as expeditiously as possible, without further discussion or argument, Palmer will identify the coward, and by thus agreeing with me, fulfilling my compact. I will be free again.

CHAPTER VII

A Note from Rap to the Reader*

* This note, which I have called Chapter VII, actually was written by me. I have included it here not only at the author's insistence, but because it forms an integral part of this story.—Ed.

WHAT would you have done, in my place?

The hazards of editing are little appreciated, but it is probably a statistical certainty that most sanitaria for nervous disorders are inhabited, to a great extent, by fiction editors. And the science-fiction editors are the cream of the crop. When most people are vacationing, they have a good time. I spend my two weeks in a big white building, talking to doctors, trying to get rid of the twitch I picked up from that last batch of fan mail. And, I might add, counting the little green Martians as they jump around on my bed.

When I received the strange manuscript which you have just read, it was almost noon. I had a date with a fascinating blonde for lunch. In the evening I had a big bowling party arranged, and the night before I had dreamed of foaming steins of beer. I was leaving my house, fairly happy about things in general, when this special messenger drove up and caught me. "Mr. Palmer?" he said.

I gulped. I had seen the envelope he carried, and to me envelopes mean manuscripts, and manuscripts mean work, and this was Saturday and I wanted to see my blonde and go bowling and drink beer. But I admitted I was Palmer. "Mr. Raymond A. Palmer?" he asked me, suspiciously.

"Yes."

"This just arrived on a chartered plane from New York. I must ask you for identification. Sign here, please."

He scrutinized my driver's license, draft card, social security, and a telephone bill, and he dumped the envelope in my arms. Sure enough, it hadn't been mailed. It had been addressed to my office, with instructions to get my home address and forward it immediately. Well, a new writer will try anything to get into print, as I know from bitter experience, but he doesn't usually charter planes. I was pretty damn curious about it by the time I arrived at the restaurant where I was to meet my blonde.

As usual, however, she was late. I ripped open the envelope and began looking through the manuscript. By the time my woman arrived, I was deep in the story, and I kept reading all through lunch. You know how blondes are when they don't get enough attention—it wasn't what you might call a successful luncheon date. But the story had gripped me and I read until I finished it.

We went for a ride along the lake front afterward. I couldn't get the story out my mind. I passed a light and got a ticket, then I scraped fenders with a bus, and my conversation was something less than coherent. But, finally, I succeeded in driving it out of my by now rather skeptical mind and I tried to make up with Felicia. That's her name. It kills me, too.

When I got back home late that afternoon, the phone rang. It was the Chicago airport. They had been calling me all afternoon; they had a seat reserved for me on the six o'clock plane to New York. Paid for. I said I wasn't

going. I had no sooner hung up when the phone went off again. It was Long Distance operator 91, and she had been calling me all afternoon from New York, and would I hold on, please, because a Mr. Clyde Woodruff wanted to talk to me.

He sounded sane. There was a quiet note of urgency in his voice. He had had the devil's own time finally locating me, out of all the Palmers in Chicago. Hadn't I read his manuscript? I had to come to New York. I had to, he kept saying.

I don't know what you would have done. I said no. Maybe he had money to burn on plane tickets, but I wasn't going to be roped into flying a thousand miles just to read the last chapter of a story. I said I liked the story immensely, and if the ending were good, I would buy it when he mailed the rest of it in to me. (I was thinking of another New York writer of mine who kept sending me stories without the last chapters; I couldn't let it become an editorial practice.)

It was at this point that his control cracked, but only for a moment. He ended by saying that he would keep a chartered plane waiting for me at the airport. He seemed pretty certain I would change my mind. And he said he would call me in an hour again.

MAYBE he called again. I wasn't home to receive it. I went out for a quiet hour of practice bowling. I bowled an 82, a 114 and a 97, and I gave it up. I went to a telephone and called the library and asked them to hunt something up in *Who's Who*. They had Clyde Woodruff III, all right, with information that bore out some of the details in the story. Then I called the *Chicago Sun* and spoke to the society editor. Yes, she knew the Woodruffs of Long Island, and Clyde Woodruff was engaged to be married the next day to Miss Dorothy Dykstra. I called the telephone company and asked for Operator 91. Where had the New York call to Raymond A. Palmer originated from? She said it had come from Seaside, Long Island. Was I Mr. Palmer? Mr. Woodruff had been trying to get in touch with me again. Would I take the call where I was?

I hung up. Nobody was going to rob me of my Saturday night bowling—not after I had dreamed of beer.

But it was no use, and I knew it. Half an hour later I took a taxi to the airport. There was a plane waiting for me, or, if I preferred, I could take the eight o'clock Mainliner: there was a seat reserved for me on every plane for New York. I took the Mainliner because I didn't like the thought of wasting so much gasoline just to get me to New York.

I read the manuscript again on the plane. I went over it very carefully. It really had me by then, and the more I read it, the more peculiar I felt. There were little details in it that puzzled me a good deal. Maybe some of them have occurred to you since you began reading this bizarre story. There were parts that didn't hang together, parts that lent themselves to a variety of interpretations. In short, there was a lot in the story that left me unsatisfied.

And that's why I decided to take the course of action I did. If I was going to go through with this business, at least I would do it my way. The thing that puzzled me most of all was the man who was supposedly at that very moment in Woodruff's New York apartment. That man was really the crux of the story. Unless I satisfied myself about him, I might never know what the devil had really happened. And, of course, there were other reasons, dictated by details of the story

itself, that impelled me to go first to the apartment. Later I would go out to see Woodruff himself. An hour wouldn't make any difference.

So, when the plane landed at La-Guardia airport, I went back to the city, to 800 Central Park South, as the story said. And, as the story had said, New York was dimmed out. I hardly recognized it as the city where I had spent my Christmas vacation; it was so dark and quiet that I thought I was back in Chicago again. But they don't breed such snooty doormen in Chicago. He just wouldn't let me up. He said that Mr. Woodruff was at his home in Long Island.

I kept insisting until finally he called the apartment on the phone. Naturally, there was no answer. Still I insisted, though I was beginning to feel pretty silly. I wanted to go up in the elevator and ring the doorbell. "Five dollars just to ring a doorbell," I said.

The doorman's eyes lighted. "Ahhh," he said, nodding his head in new understanding. "You're one of them guys that gets a kick out of ringing doorbell, eh?"

"Yeah," I said, "I feel like it wuz Hallowe'en."

"For five bucks, it's Hallowe'en, buddy," he said, and he escorted me into the elevator and took me upstairs. He watched me as I rang the doorbell. No answer. It didn't mean anything—according to the story, if there was someone inside he couldn't show himself; he couldn't voluntarily interfere with Woodruff's life.

"Five more for another ring?" I said.

"Oh, mister," smiled the doorman, taking the five.

I had a plan, naturally. I wasn't just wasting money.

I GAVE him five dollars for each time I rang the bell. I rang it with different rhythms, sometimes soft, sometimes loud. After it had cost me twenty-five dollars, I said, sounding disappointed, "I guess he didn't come yet. I must be early. Is it one-thirty yet?"

"It's 12:55," said the doorman.

"The hell it is!" I said, angry, and I took out my watch, shook it and glared at it. "This watch stinks!" I said, and I laid it on the rug and jumped on it. It came apart as only a cheap watch can. The doorman just stood there, taking it all in.

"Then I'll go inside and wait," I said, still mad. "Woody said he'd meet me here at one-thirty. We're cooking up something." I stood at the door and I said, "Open it up with your pass-key. I'm one of Mr. Woodruff's friends."

The doorman looked at the twenty-five dollars and my watch and he nodded soberly. "You didn't have to tell me that, mister," he said. "I know Mr. Woodruff's friends when I see them." And he opened the door and let me in.

The apartment was dark. I flipped on a switch, after nearly knocking over a vase finding it. It was a duplex, and it must have cost a tidy sum to furnish it. There hadn't been an accurate description of the place in the story, but this felt right. And there, across the living-room, was the short flight of stairs that led to two adjoining rooms that should be a bedroom and a study.

There wasn't the slightest sound in the place. I went up the stairs and tried to look under the threshold of the doors to see if there was a light in either of the rooms, but the door fitted too well. At this point I began to feel like a damn fool. I knocked on the first door. There was no response. Nothing happened when I knocked on the other door. I thought to myself that I had paid the equivalent of

twenty-nine dollars to ring one bell and knock on two doors. It would be difficult asking Woodruff to reimburse me such a sum. It was a hell of a thing to put down on an expense account.

Then I pushed open the first door—and there he was!

"Who are you?" he said. "What are you doing here?" He had been standing near the door, evidently hearing me in the living-room, and certainly he had heard the doorbell and the knocking on his door. He was a tall young man, well built, with dark, puzzled eyes and close-cropped hair. He watched me as I walked into the room, putting my envelope down.

"My name's Palmer," I said. "The doorman let me in. I'm a friend of Clyde Woodruff's."

"I am Clyde Woodruff," he said. "What are you doing here?"

"I know all about you," I said. "Mr. Woodruff had me come a thousand miles to be sure about you. All I want to do now is look at you a few minutes, before I go out to Seaside."

"What are you talking about?" he said, bewildered. "What do you mean —you know all about me? And what is this about—"

"Never mind," I said. "I'm here to identify you." I took a hard swallow before I could get out the words. There was still a chance that this was a sensational, super-hoax of some sort. I said, with an effort to speak distinctly, "I'm the third person who is necessary to break the compact you made . . . if you know what I'm referring to. . . ."

I couldn't have hit him any harder if I had used an axe. He just stood there and he whispered, "Oh my God." I thought he was going to fall and I took his arm. He shook me off. "It can't be," he said, shaking his head. "It's impossible. What can you posibly know about this? How can you. . . ." He didn't finish. He was looking at me, one hand pressed against his face, staring at me.

"Is this a gag?" I said. He didn't answer. I said, "Well, it had to end sometime, and I guess you know that Woodruff would work out some way to beat you in the end."

His hands were at his sides, his fists tightly clenched, and his arms trembled as he tried to control himself. "But I am Woodruff!" he cried. "Don't you understand—*I am Woodruff!*"

I DIDN'T know what to say. There was no sense contradicting him. He came closer to me and he said, "Do you mean you understand everything that's happened here . . . all of it, from the beginning? Then you must know that I—"

"What's the use?" I said. I was beginning to feel sorry for him. He was really flesh and blood, though I was afraid to touch him. "I know the whole thing," I said. "You're the coward. Are you satisfied now?" I was waiting for him to break down. "I'm going to call Woodruff on the phone," I added. "He can save me a trip back here by coming out here right now himself."

"The *what?*" he said.

"The what what?"

"You called me . . . the *coward?*"

"Well, you are, aren't you? You've got to be. Process of elimination. You're the last one except for Woodruff himself."

"You mean you're identifying me as the *coward?*" he said. He had a peculiar quality in his voice. It did things to me, shook my insides somehow. It was the kind of voice you always imagine you'll hear from a condemned man, if you ever get in such a spot. It was the voice, more than anything else, that first created the inkling of doubt. There had been doubt before, you may

remember, but it had vanished the moment I laid eyes on him.

"But there never was a coward among us!" he said.

"No?"

"You don't understand—"

"Was there a killer?" I interrupted. "And then a fool? And then Woodruff? And then a liar? That leaves you as the coward."

"No!" he cried. "There was no liar! And no coward! The liar—"

"Let's not waste any more time," I said. "Here's a little manuscript that will show you just how hopeless it is. You read it and I'll just relax a little from that ride I took."

I gave him the manuscript. His face was as pale as the sheets of paper. He sat down in a chair and began reading feverishly. Because I knew the effect it would have on him, I went out and sat in the living-room, and I mixed myself a mild drink. I was satisfied that I had done the best I could. I had been fair to an extreme that might haunt me. But I would get this manuscript, and maybe it was worth it. The story would never be believed, but it was quite a story.

A little more than half an hour later, I went back. He had almost finished reading it, and he was at the last few pages. He read them with such care, such burning intensity, that I marveled at it. When he finished, he stood up and surveyed me, as if he was seeing me for the first time. He seemed much calmer now. Resigned, I thought. He lit a cigarette, just as each Woodruff in the story had done so many times before.

"Mr. Palmer," he said, "from the start I felt that I would win out in this struggle, just as it says here. But I never dreamed I would run into such luck. I tell you honestly that I didn't know how to begin working out the last part of this compact."

'You're not admitting anything?" I asked, surprised.

He shook his head. "This manuscript is one of the shrewdest things ever concocted. I don't expect you to believe me—not yet. But if you'll just sit quietly and listen to me for five minutes, I'll give you the incontrovertible evidence that our compact called for."

I nodded for him to go ahead, wondering what he had thought up.

"WHILE I do not expect you to believe what I say, I want you, nevertheless, to pretend to yourself that you do believe it, to give my story the substance it cannot yet have.

"First," he continued, "though this manuscript was written by the supposedly real Clyde Woodruff, the truth is that I am the real Woodruff, and I did not write it. The story related in these pages is, nevertheless, true in the main. Its first lie is in the identification of the four other men who were in this room with me. *There never was a coward.* There was a killer, a fool, a liar and a fourth who was a crafty, ruthless person, shrewd and calculating. I can't define him in a single word as I could the others. I don't think any of us defined him in a single word; in a sense he was the most complex character of all.

"That is the first lie in this story. The episode which describes the killer is true. So is the one which deals with the fool. The chapter which describes what happened to the real Woodruff when he went third is likewise true. It happened, however, to *me*. I was brought back to this room, and I was then the last to go. The fourth to go was the man who accused Jenks of complicity in the missing notes. His story is true up to the end, with one serious defection.

"The fourth man was never identified as the liar. I and the man who was left here with me agreed that he was the—for the sake of convenience, I'll call him the *crafty* one. We ended the life of the crafty one by identifying him. Now, follow me carefully. When he had disposed of the killer, the fool, the crafty one—who was left? Only the liar and me.

"It was the liar who wrote this manuscript. I saw him writing it all the time I was here, without knowing what it was. He must have gotten the idea originally because he drew the fifth straw. He was to be the last to go, until I took over that place because they could not agree on my identification. He planned it with amazing cleverness.

"First, he assumed my identity in writing this story. Second, he created a category that never existed—by naming a coward instead of the crafty one. Third, he said that we had agreed that the fourth was the liar. *He did this because it eliminated the liar from the story altogether.* Suppose he had not done that. Suppose he had truthfully described the identification of the crafty one. He would then have come to the end of the story with two characters left — himself, supposedly the real Woodruff—and the liar.

'Now, if he told anyone this story, as he has told it here to you, admitting that the liar still existed, would there not be some faint possibility of doubt in your mind? If you knew that of the two who had survived, that one was a liar—might you not tread easily? Might you not be a bit more careful before you agreed with him? It was to avoid taking such a chance that he labeled the fourth the liar, thus completely removing that category from consideration. . . . "

I interrupted. "Are you saying that the one who survived with you—assuming for a moment that you are the real Woodruff—was the liar?"

"Exactly."

"Then, if I follow you, you are saying that he built up a case from the beginning to assume your identity. But you are ascribing such foresight to him that it hardly seems credible."

"Not foresight," he said. "It was hindsight. He wrote only part of this story here in this room. He says he only finished the story this morning, but actually, he wrote a great deal of it then. He must have gone back through the beginning, doctoring it to fit the case he was building. Once things have happened, it is easier to re-interpret them according to a fixed plan. I intend to show you how that plan operated, and where it failed, for failed it has."

"Suppose you explain how you're here, if you're the real Woodruff, when this manuscript says the real Woodruff is at Seaside."

HE smiled. "Only a liar understands how strong a simple perversion of the truth is. Put yourself in his place. He had drawn the fifth chance. When I became last, I was to remain here after him. That is what happened. Now he wrote most of this story. He doctored is so that you would think he was the real Woodruff, and to substantiate that, he told a simple lie.

"He merely said *that the coward was afraid to go,* and offered him the chance. To make this plausible, he first had to have a coward. He didn't have one, so he *created* one. No matter what you might try to check in this story, you would find that the events described in it are all true—he saw to that. But how could you check up to find out if there had really been a coward? There was no way. The other three are gone. You would have to take his word for it. Since he could demonstrate the truth of the

rest of the story, why should you doubt that? And the way he told it, it does seem as if there was a coward, and that coward is me, the one who was afraid to go, and is therefore here.

"So he wrote in a minor change—a coward. The crafty one he never mentioned at all because he needed *his* place in the story for the liar—the liar he wanted to get rid of. Is it clear so far?"

"Yes," I said. "Very complicated, but clear. Go on."

"We come then to the conclusion of a seemingly perfect plan. The killer is eliminated, and so is the fool. He takes over the identity of the real Woodruff, describes what happened to *me* as having happened to *him,* and says he was now last. He then tells the story of the crafty one, labeling him the liar. That leaves only him, supposedly the real Woodruff, and the coward, whom he created: this as opposed to the real Woodruff, who I am, and the liar—which is he. He then neatly transposes the matter by saying that the coward offered him his chance, and he took it. And that, in your mind, fixes the location of the real Woodruff as being now at Seaside. All right?"

"Yes," I said, "though I think you're overdoing the repetition. You've said the same thing two or three times."

"I want to be sure it's perfectly clear."

"It is, so far."

"He then finished up the manuscript to agree with this plan. It wasn't difficult, for the most part. He sent it to you, expecting you to go to Seaside. I still don't know why you came here instead, but that is the turning point in this story. At any rate, once you were at Seaside, you could check up on his manuscript. You might talk to Bancroft, Jenks, Robert, Dorothy, Alonzo, Vanness, Holmes, Mahoney—to all of them, and you would see that this story was true.

"*But you could not talk to Ann Hunter!* He saw to that. When he took his turn, going fifth in regular order, he shrewdly told Ann early this morning that he had to reverse himself, that Dorothy insisted she leave the grounds. Ann packed up and left. If you go to Seaside, you will find that Ann Hunter is no longer there.

"But why did he do that? He did it because he couldn't have Ann there! *Because the scene he described between Ann and Woodruff never happened! It was a pure lie—a complete fabrication!*"

That floored me. "I don't see that part of it," I said.

"It's a magnificent plan," he said sincerely. "I can almost detach myself from it and admire the brain that conceived it. . . .

"Here's how it worked. He had to write that scene in because he needed it to label the fourth one a liar. If we go back through the chapter that describes the events in which the fourth Woodruff figured, we nowhere find any evidence to support the assumption that he was the liar. We find plenty of evidence to show that he was crafty, however. Did you see that?"

"Yes," I admitted. "I thought that part of it was weak, but the conclusion seemed sound enough. If he really lied to Ann that way—"

"BUT he didn't!" he interrupted. "That part of it never happened, as I've said. Now, examining those events, we see that the fourth Woodruff exhibited certain characteristics. He had an orderliness of mind. It showed, for instance, in the way he labeled his thoughts by numbers. He would say 'first' this and 'second' that—as I am well aware I am doing myself

—but then, he was part of me.

"And he was the first of all four Woodruffs (including myself) to begin assembling the bits of evidence against Jenks. True, Bancroft built up a case against him that was wonderful, but we know that there is no truth to it. It is just one of those things. We do not, however, know that the case against Jenks is untrue. There are vital flaws in it, but I myself am still not convinced.

"Had I been there, I doubt that I would have gone about presenting the case to Bancroft in such a heartless fashion. The crafty one didn't care. The crafty part of Woodruff, the ruthless Woodruff who gambles on the Stock Exchange, who destroys competitors, whose chief joy in life is outguessing the next fellow—that Woodruff wouldn't care much about Jenks. He would assemble the contradictions that pointed to a friend's guilt with no compunction. He would as soon outfox a friend as anyone else—the game was the thing for him.

"As it happened, he was stymied by Bancroft's objections. *But there was no evidence that he was a liar!* We know that everything he said about Jenks was true, if unexplained. How then could the liar, writing this story, re-interpret his actions so as to be able to call *him* a liar? There was no way, on the basis of what had happened. If he changed the details of the events, you might come across the discrepancy.

"So he made up a scene! Actually, Ann had gone up to bed. She did not come down. There never was any love-making between Woodruff and Ann. But when the liar wrote the scene in, that gave him his chance to call the fourth Woodruff a liar. He merely said that Woodruff had lied when he told Ann that he loved her. That accusation carried authority now. Now he could carry the stigma over. He could become indignant in his comment on that chapter as he spoke of the fourth Woodruff. He could call him a destroyer, and make that word synonomous with liar. He could say that Woodruff had lied when he accused his friend—and with that false scene between Ann and Woodruff, he could back it up!

"But there still remained one thing to be taken care of. If you, Mr. Palmer, came to Seaside to investigate, you might just possibly question Ann Hunter. It was easily avoided, in this way. . . .

"The life of the fourth Woodruff actually ended when he left Bancroft in the library. We called for identification, and we agreed that the fourth Woodruff was the crafty one. That ended his life. Now the liar took his turn. The next morning, without much ado about it, as I've already told you, he told Ann she had better leave. When Ann left, the coast was clear. There was nothing more to fear. If you asked him about Ann, believing the scene was true, he could have told you any one of a dozen stories—that she couldn't go through with it—that she hadn't the courage. Would you have suspected? You had no reason to.

"Then, once you had come to Seaside tonight, once he had convinced you, he would bring you here, and as he says—*without any further discussion or argument*—you would agree with him and end my life. Of course he wanted it without discussion. That might lead anywhere! It might even lead to the disclosure of the truth—as I have given it to you now!"

I DIDN'T say anything for awhile after he had finished speaking. If I had thought the story bizarre before this, what could I think about it now? Even an editor, I was forced to admit

to myself, seldom came across anything like this. It baffled me. It taunted and perplexed me. I was half dizzy from having read the story, with its hypotheses and counter-hypotheses, with one set of circumstances yielding first one story and then another. And here the story itself had become the basis for a completely different hypothesis!

"Of course," I said, at length, "the final test of your story depends on Ann Hunter. The fact that she can't be found is as bad for your version as you say it is for the version in the manuscript."

"But I know where you can find her!" he said, vehemently.

"Where?"

"When he told her that she had to leave, she smiled at him very sweetly. She said she didn't blame him a bit, she understood perfectly. And it hadn't been a wasted week-end, she said, because that morning Robert had told her where he had learned to mix the champagne cocktail she liked so much. She would spend the rest of the week-end at the Astor bar, she said, toasting the future happiness of the Woodruffs."

"Ironic?" I said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Oh, I don't know," I hedged. "But you heard her tell this to the . . . the fifth Woodruff? Seems funny."

"It wasn't funny to me. I didn't know why he had sent her away."

"You wouldn't have done it?" I said.

"No," he said, thoughtfully. "You know, now that you put it that way, there was something ironic about the way she said that. . . . "

"Hmmmm," I said, from the depths of my wisdom. Because as much as he had learned about himself, he still didn't really understand what Clyde Woodruff was all about. I got up and reached for my battered old hat. "You'd better give me a key," I said. "I can't afford to buy another door man when I come back."

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To the Astor bar, to bring Miss Ann Hunter back here."

It bothered him. "Why don't you just talk to her—say you're my lawyer or something, and sound her out?"

"I like it my way," I said, flatly, without going into it. "And one more thing. I'm still an editor, you know, and I still want good stories. One of the conditions on which I offer my help is your promise that I can keep this manuscript, if we can find an ending, and publish it. And I've got some interesting ideas about ending it."

He didn't like it. He started to protest, so I took off my hat and sat down again. The argument ended abruptly. I'll be damned, I thought to myself, if I'll travel a thousand miles for a story and come back without it—especially one like this.

He gave me a key, and as I left, he said, "To get to the Astor—"

"Are you telling me?" I said. "I've been there, brother. I had enough champagne last Christmas to float a battle cruiser."

I took a taxi downtown. The doorman had asked me, "No luck?" and I told him I was going to bring me some company, to make the waiting easier. I wasn't half as confident as I sounded. In the first place, what made me assume she would be at the Astor bar? I had my own reasons for thinking she would, but that was neither here nor there. In the second place, assuming she *was* there, what made me think she would come back with me? And in the third place, though it should have been the first place—what made me believe *this* story more than the other one? I liked it better, maybe. But mainly it was because I am a sucker for the kind

of twist I thought I saw coming up here.

THE minute I walked into the bar I knew it was she. Strangely enough, he had forgotten to tell me what she looked like, but all I needed was the description in the story—and one look. A slender, beautiful, dark-haired girl with piercing blue eyes.

"Do I interest you so much?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon," I said. I had leaned over the bar and stared at her for perhaps half a minute before she made me aware of it. "I was trying to be sure you're the person I'm looking for," I explained. "I think you must be Miss Ann Hunter?"

"Yes, indeed," she said. "Have a drink with me. They make—"

"The best champagne cocktails I ever had," I finished, smiling at her. "Only they're not really cocktails. When you shoot brandy into champagne, you get a drink called a French .75—or didn't Robert tell you that? He makes one that's even better than the Astor's."

"Oh," she said, faintly. "How do you know—"

"Miss Hunter," I said, "right now I'm just about as omniscient as the Lord himself. Sometimes I think I know everything. I'm a friend of Clyde Woodruff's. To come right down to it, that's why I'm here. I'm acting as a sort of Mercury for him, wing-footing an urgent message. He wants to see you. Must see you, in fact."

"Really?" she said, dryly.

"I told you I was omniscient," I said. "It's my guess that you'd like to see him as much as he wants to see you. I know what you're thinking. Well, he couldn't come himself. It's a long, complicated, and thoroughly unbelievable story, but it's going to see print one of these days, and I'll mail you a copy. Now let's have a drink together and we'll run over there."

"Back to that foul, mob-ridden, haunted palace? Not me, mister!"

"Palmer's the name, and Woody's there at his apartment. He came all the way there just to see you. Tell me," I said, "don't you have a queer little tingling sensation inside when you mention his name?" I grinned at her and added, quietly, "Don't kid me, please."

She looked at her drink and swallowed it in one gulp. Then she gave me the same look and she said, "I'll be damned if I don't think you're something right out of a fairy tale. You're —you're supernatural! You've been dancing with elves in the light of the moon."

"Uh-huh," I agreed, slapping my hat back on and swallowing my drink. "And I've got a dancing date later tonight. Let's go."

You should have seen the look the doorman gave me when I popped out of the taxi with Ann in tow. "Got a five to lend me?" I whispered to Ann. She found one, and I sneaked it away and casually tossed it to him. "That's in case I accidentally ring the bell," I told him.

We went up, and I let us in with the pass-key. I took her into the library. She walked in hesitantly. Woodruff stood there, looking across the room at her. You could hardly hear their voices when they exchanged hellos, but there was something in it, just the same, that got me. They might have stood that way, eating each other up with their eyes indefinitely, if I hadn't brought them back to life.

"Sit down, the both of you," I said. "I've got something here I want to read to you, Miss Hunter. This is something a clever young man wrote. I don't think it's true, but I want you to tell me whether it is or isn't—whether it hap-

pened, that is. Don't be shocked by it, and don't interrupt me. It isn't very long."

I FUMBLED through the manuscript, and I read them the story, beginning with Woodruff's return to the kitchen. My voice jumped a little when I got them out on the veranda, and I think I whispered the last part of it altogether. And when it was through, it was so quiet I could hear my heart thumping.

"Did it happen?" I asked.

"No," she said, very quietly, looking down at the floor. "Why did you bring me here?"

I waited, hoping Woodruff would give her the answer I had already phrased in my mind. But he sat like someone turned to stone. "I'll tell you why I brought you here," I said, disgusted. "Because—"

"Because it should have happened, Ann," said Woodruff. "Because with all my heart, I wanted it to happen."

After a moment, she said, "Then you found out?"

"Yes," he said. He could move, I discovered. He got off the chair and came to her and he took her in his arms, not the least bit ashamed before me. "I love you, Ann," he said. "Not the silly, stupid way it was written in that thing, but I love you. I'm not going to marry Dorothy. We'll go away tomorrow, the both of us. And I'll tell Dorothy tonight . . . "

He kissed her then, and maybe it was because his eyes were closed that he didn't see the effect his last words had had on her. But I hadn't missed a thing. I knew I should have silently stolen away, but I had to know what this thing I had perceived meant.

"Ann," I said, "if I may call you Ann—I've got to ask you something. . . . " I waited until they melted apart, then I said, bluffing, because I didn't know the answer myself, "Suppose you tell Woody what you really meant when you asked him, a moment ago, whether he had found out?"

"He . . . he doesn't know?" she faltered.

"No," I said. "And I'd rather you told him than me."

In the moments that sped by while she debated the question within her, I must have run through a thousand conjectures. What was she going to tell him? Just before he had kissed her, when he had said, "I'll tell Dorothy tonight," she had been puzzled, as if she couldn't understand those simple few words.

Now, quietly, she went to her bag and took out a small photograph. I recalled having seen her holding it at the bar, but she had quickly put it away. She gave the photograph to Woodruff. He looked at it for a long time, then he gave it to me.

It had been taken in the garden. It was a picture of David Jenks and Dorothy Dykstra. They were locked in an embrace that could only have been classified as violent as they kissed in the darkness—for the photograph had evidently been taken without light.

"I thought you knew," she said, softly. "I took it last night while I was taking pictures around the grounds. I was using my infra-red camera, and it was so dark I didn't know who the people were . . . until I developed the picture . . . "

"And you didn't tell me?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, though I almost did when I found out someone had wrecked my things. I was so mad for awhile that . . . " She shrugged. "And then I thought that I had no right, that it was none of my business. If I had been her, and I thought I'd been discovered, I'd have wrecked a dozen places. I'd have had me kicked

off the grounds . . . "

Wondering, Woodruff said, "And that's what you had in mind this morning when you left and you said you were going to toast my future happiness. . . . " The implications behind that photograph were just beginning to become apparent to him. He shrugged involuntarily.

"But it's a thousand times better this way, darling," she said, gently. "I thought at first that I was getting you on the rebound, and I was happy to have you in any way. But you really do love me. . . . "

I let them at each other for a few minutes, then I tapped Woodruff's shoulder. "There's still one or two details to be settled," I reminded him. "I'd better take Miss Hunter home now. You can go to her as soon as we've finished our business."

WELL, when she let go of him, she flung her arms around me and kissed me, and it was the kind of kiss I'd *walk* a thousand miles for, every day. She left us alone for a few minutes. I said to Woodruff, "Before I forget it, make a note of this—the workshop was wrecked not because of this photograph, but because Jenks was afraid it might show him talking to a man with a white carnation. Your first assumption was correct. He couldn't have known about this picture."

"What are you getting at?" he asked.

"Getting at?" I said, disgusted. "Why, you've got every damn bit of a clue you need by now, and now you're so doggone crazy in love that you can't see farther than your nose! You know what I'm going to do now? I'm going to find you that *motive* that your crafty friend was hunting for. But first I'm going out to fetch back our amazing liar."

"How will you do it?"

"You take a nap," I advised him. "I'll do the rest. I'm beginning to enjoy this."

He tried to thank me, but I'd been thanked enough already. As I said, I'm a terrific sucker for romance. I thought to myself that the supreme irony of all lay in the fact that it was the liar, his strongest adversary, who had come closest to finding the true Woodruff, inadvertent though it was. It was the liar, of all the Woodruffs, who had most demonstrated the real Woodruff's ability to understand people. He had been a really amazing psychologist, that liar. He had wrapped himself so completely in his borrowed personality that he had written with absolute conviction. He *had* been Woodruff. One had only to read the manuscript, to search the long passages of introspection, to appreciate how hellishly clever he had been.

And, for that matter, each of the four Woodruffs had done him a remarkable service, if only in that they revealed Woodruff to himself. . . .

I took Ann home and then I headed out to Seaside. I made short shrift of the rest of it. Woodruff the liar was waiting impatiently for me; Chicago had told him I'd taken the plane. I went over the manuscript with him in some detail, watching his reactions.

I even spoke to Mahoney. Somehow Mahoney seemed spiritless, but he answered my questions diligently. Sometimes we could hardly hear ourselves talk—the party was wilder that night than it had been the night before, granting that the description of the night before had been accurate. Dorothy Dykstra floated by me, favored me with a smile when I was introduced to her. Robert mixed me a French .75, and it was great.

The hell of it was that this Woodruff was a completely real person, rather charming, too—but let's not get back

into that again. I expressed the proper astonishment at the story, and in a convincing way I let myself be convinced. Then I agreed that it was time we went to the city apartment, where, Woodruff assured me, my previous disbelief would be a petty thing indeed beside what he would show me.

I held out for only one small exception. I wanted him to take Professor Jenks along with us, in case, I said, I wanted to check on one or two minor points that troubled me the least bit. I could have asked for anything and gotten it. Woodruff got Jenks to come with us by saying that the drive would do Jenks a world of good. He could have thought up a dozen fancier reasons if he had needed them, I thought.

We drove back to the city together. When we stopped in front of the house I borrowed five dollars from Woodruff and gave it to the doorman without a word. I wondered if he would say anything that might disturb Woodruff, but he was too dazed by then to open his mouth.

Woodruff let us into the apartment. He excused himself from Jenks and took me into the library. He closed the door softly and pointed to the real Woodruff. "Well," he said, addressing the real Woodruff, "it's over now for you. I've brought the third person here to identify you. I ask only that you control your cowardice without making any outcries. . . . Mr. Palmer—I give you the coward!"

"We've met," I said, dryly. "I stopped over here earlier this evening and had a chat with Mr. Woodruff and Miss Hunter. Now then, my boy," I said to Woody, pointing to the liar, "who do you say this is?"

"The liar," said Woodruff.

I cleared my throat. "I don't know how I'm supposed to say this," I said, "but I might as well make it formal."

Then I cleared my throat again, for effect, and I said, "By virtue of the authority vested in me as the third person necessary to break this compact by proper identification of one of the two surviving parties to the aforementioned compact, and fully cognizant of all the whereases and wherefores of the aforementioned compact, and acquainted with every devious device used by the party subsequently referred to by me as the liar—" I had to take a breath at that point—"I do hereby attest and affirm that I agree completely and without reservation in the identification just made—and that I call you the liar!"

HE HAD been there the instant before . . . and now . . . well, he just wasn't. That's all. Not even a sound, not a bit of lightning or anything you might think suitable for such an occasion. But if I live to be a thousand years old, I will never forget the look on his face when I went into that speech. There's no use trying to describe it. Maybe one of my good writers like Don Wilcox or Dave O'Brien or Bill McGivern, or even Frank Patten, could handle a description like that. Not me. Just the same, it seemed to me that I could see that expression hanging in mid-air for a few seconds after the rest of him disappeared. Yes, sir, it was that frozen!

By the same token, there's not much more that I can tell you that Clyde Woodruff couldn't tell better. And according to his promise, he had to finish the story, so suppose we let him?

CHAPTER VIII

As the Editor Ordered

IF YOU will glance back at the explanation with which I began this

story, it should make some sense at this point. I wrote it just before I began this last chapter, and I mean what I say in it. I have protested to Palmer that I don't want any of this to appear, but he won't let me off. He calmly says that he has a printing press for a heart and ink instead of blood in his veins.

Having said the worst about him, perhaps I should tell you there is another side to him. I've read his Chapter VII, which he says will appear just before this last chapter, and I can see what he means when he says that Ann said he had been dancing with elves in the moonlight. You'd have to meet him to understand that, I'm afraid, though I wouldn't have said elves. I'd have chosen the little men who bowled and drank beer with Rip Van Winkle up in the mountains.

But since I must finish this, I must. I intend to hurry the job, so bear with me and hang on, because I don't pretend to have any style and I never was much of a writer except on checks. . . .

When Palmer arranged for the liar to disappear, he instantly got busy. We had Jenks outside, you remember, and Palmer had promised me the motive. He insisted that I already had the whole thing solved myself, but I was too blind to see it. He asked me a dozen questions and dragged answers out of me. I'll try to quote him as best I can.

"The main thing," he said, "is that Jenks both appears guilty and doesn't. He certainly lied. He certainly was outside the garage with one of the men who wore a carnation. He was also, if you recall, with Dorothy a good deal. Where was he shortly after the fight in the pavilion, when Bancroft and you figured out he must be missing? He showed up and confounded you, and by his own admission, he had been with Dorothy.

"And where was he when you got mixed up in that thing at the pier? He had been comforting Dorothy again! Now, you hadn't seen Jenks in years, and even in the months since you gave him that laboratory, you said yourself that you had only seen him once or twice. Assuming even then that Jenks had met Dorothy every time you did, didn't you think it strange that he should be on such intimate terms with her? Wasn't it odd that he was always on hand to comfort her?

"Sure you did—though you wouldn't admit it to yourself. Just like you wouldn't admit the sneaking suspicion you always had that your Dorothy girl was marrying your money. She had no use for your friends, for your habits, for your cut-throat business sense. And you hated her friends and everything she stood for. She drove you to drink. She was the unconscious reason for every escapade you had with women —you were always hoping you could get out of it, but you never quite were able to make it. Somehow you always wound up engaged to her again. That wasn't your doing—it was hers. She had you on a string, and sometimes she let the string out a little. It's apparent in every line in the story, even though it was written by a liar. I guess you can lie successfully to anyone but a liar, huh?

"But to return to Jenks. That case that the crafty one in you outlined to Bancroft wasn't a bad case. Bancroft tore it apart, but the parts could have been made into an excellent pattern to fit Jenks—if you could find that master pattern—*a motive.*

"All right. Now what you've just found out about Jenks and your Dorothy is the beginnings of a motive. But before you can begin to understand the motive, you must understand Jenks. Ask yourself the question Bancroft

asked—if Jenks is guilty, then why did he call in the F.B.I.? It's a damn good question. You might say that maybe you could show that it wasn't Jenks who had called them in. If you could show that, you'd have something. Unfortunately, Jenks did call them in, but the theory behind the question is still a good one.

"What you are doing with that theory is trying to separate the Jenks who is guilty from the Jenks who called in the F.B.I. Right? Do you see it now? You still don't? Then we must demonstrate!"

We went out and took Jenks with us. We drove to the laboratory. I watched Jenks and I saw he was shaking as if a fever had gotten into him. He could hardly walk when we got to the lab. Palmer said, "Now, whatever happens, hold on to Jenks. Hold his arm. And don't let go."

We went through the lab, and just before we entered Jenks' private office, Palmer took a deep breath. Then in we walked. There was nothing there. Palmer, nothing daunted, led us back to the cab. "We'll go to Jenks' home," he said. "I sort of counted on the lab, but I see I was wrong."

Jenks grew worse. He spoke in little meaningless snatches, and he was evidently paralyzed with fear. We stopped before his place and went up. I took hold of Jenks' arm and held it tightly while Palmer opened the door.

And there, standing against the window was a second Jenks!

I don't know if I've made it appear as dramatic to you as it was in real life. This other Jenks had seen us coming from the window. He had a terrible smile on his face.

"How does one do it?" Palmer asked him.

The Jenks who had been in the room said, quietly, "Anything will do. The compact could have been broken at any time by Woody's violence. We need that violence now. Kill him!"

I held the first Jenks firmly. Palmer said to me, with a little gulp, "I guess you'd better strangle him."

"What?" I said, feeling faint.

"Strangle him," said Palmer. "He's no more real than your liar was!"

I'd rather skip over that part, if it's all the same to you. I didn't really have to strangle him, though. He died at the first touch of my hands because the *intent* to kill was in them. He died and there was nothing in my hands. Just . . . nothing. . . .

And then Jenks broke down and wept like a baby. There was no consoling him. He poured his heart out to us. He told us everything, and the story spilled out of him like a disease.

He had been in love with Dorothy and she with him from the first time they had met. Genuine love it was, too. But there was nothing he could do about it. He wanted to tell me but she had refused. He had no money and she would never marry him. Her youth had been marred by the constant spectre of poverty. But they had continued to see each other, though they knew it was a hopeless love.

And then he had discovered this drug. Like many a scientist before him, he had experimented with it upon himself. It was too late when he realized what had happened to him. It had separated him into two beings—one who was him, the other who was evil. And because his will was thus divided, as many a man's is between his conflicting desires, he had been forced into a compact with his evil self.

For several days his conflicting wills had fought for possession of his being, until, half crazed, he had agreed to a compact. They would alternate in controlling the man who was Jenks. Each,

while he was Jenks, would have freedom of action. The contest would be fought to a finish, and the prize would be either the attainment or the loss of what Jenks wanted most in this world —Dorothy. If, by four o'clock that Sunday she had married me, the evil Jenks would lose. If she had not married me, if she declared that she was to marry Jenks before that hour, the good Jenks would lose.

For it was the good Jenks who had tried to tear her out of his heart and mind, believing that I had loved her. He could not help his love for her, but he fought against it. He wanted to stop seeing her, but his other self drove him on. And then, with the drug, that other self, the evil self, had come to have an equal share in what he had. If that evil self allowed the other to renounce, or in any way lose Dorothy, then the evil self was doomed.

The terms of their compact were simple. Neither could tell the truth of what had happened to Jenks. They could not communicate in any way this monstrous thing that had befallen him. But within those bounds there was freedom. One might try persuading Dorothy to run away with him. He might do anything to gain that end. The other could do the same to attain his end. But—if the evil were recognized by *me*—and if there was thus violence, as they expected there would be, then the evil was doomed.

The evil self, in control of Jenks, had undertaken to sell the drug to the German government. It would provide him with money enough, and quickly enough to win Dorothy. The good, for his part, fought the arrangement until there was such chaos between their mixed plans that they had agreed to extend that duel until four o'clock on Sunday. The foreign agent was instructed to contact Jenks at four o'clock. By then it would be apparent who had won by seeing whether or not the wedding went through.

It was the good self who called in the F.B.I. It was he who told me the truth of the compound, for he could tell me that much, but he could not say anything more. It was the bad who had left the rum bottle filled with the compound, knowing that Jenks was going to call me to the lab, as he had already wired me to come to him that morning. And so the evil Jenks had prepared a charactertistic pitfall for me. It would be Friday afternoon and I would be drunk, and the bottle of rum would be irresistible to me.

He had been right in his calculations. The good Jenks had hidden the bottle in his desk, but I had found it in the few minutes he had been gone with Bancroft. . . .

We left him then. He was too broken to speak, and there was little left for him to say. Palmer worked out the rest of it.

"It was the evil Jenks," he said, "who came to your apartment when you found the four men in your library. He wanted to know what had happened to you, so that he could use that knowledge to further confuse you. He told the truth when he said he didn't know what it would do to you—you had taken so much, remember. So he tried to frighten you by telling you that you would die unless it had changed you.

"Unfortunately for him, he was dealing with the killer, and the killer didn't frighten easily. Meanwhile, he had contacted his agent again and notified him that the F.B.I. was in on the case. He couldn't change his plans, much to the confusion of the Nazis, because that was part of his compact with the good Jenks. But he could try to throw the F.B.I. off the trail. So he had them send in a dozen men with phony F.B.I.

badges. He lured Mahoney into a trap and planted false notes on Miller, using the woman and confederate.

"But he had slipped, just a little. You knew the notes were false, and you said so. Then the evil Jenks came in and said they were real. He almost sewed up the case for himself then, but there was another hitch—his agents had hidden Harrison, as Jenks told us a little while ago, in one of the underground lockers in the boat-house, and Bancroft wouldn't leave. Meanwhile Bancroft discovered the ruse of the white carnations, and he began rounding them up.

"At this point, the Nazis, afraid it was going to slip out of their hands, unable to understand Jenks' refusal to change the appointment for four o'clock Sunday when he himself had told them the appointment was known to the F.B.I.—the Nazis decided to take matters into their own hands. They knew that Jenks knew the formula by heart, so they decided to kidnap Jenks and force the formula out of him at their leisure.

"Here again, Bancroft forestalled them. He knew they wanted to kidnap someone, but he didn't know who, and he sent Holmes, hoping that he might get the Nazis to reveal it inadvertently. They had no luck with the Nazis, but you, under the pier, heard enough to make you sure that Jenks was involved in it.

"You confronted Jenks with your questions—but *this* was the good Jenks! If you will go back to that conversation, you will see how he tried to lead you to make the right conclusions. He really was trying to help you then, as he had been all along.

"He told you that it wasn't always possible for one to explain what was going on in one's mind. What was he driving at? You knew he meant something, but you couldn't quite grasp it. Then he told you that he had known all along about you. He then as much as told you, though he was speaking *through* the fourth Woodruff, that there was something for you to work out. He couldn't know which Woodruff he was talking to, but what he was trying to do was demonstrate that *he not only knew what had happened to you, but that such a thing had also happened to him!*

"That is what he meant when he said he hoped the real Woodruff would understand—for how else could he *know* what had happened to you *unless it had already happened to him?*"

There was only one other question I had to ask.

"How did you know when we went to Jenks' house that the Jenks we had with us was the evil one?"

"Because," said Palmer, "the good Jenks would have been delighted when he saw that you finally understood, but this one was terrified."

And that's about it, I guess, though there are still some details that may interest you. Palmer says a writer owes a debt to his readers; when he introduces characters and talks about them, he just can't run off and leave them in the lurch. So here's the dope, done up swiftly and in statistical form.

The Nazi boat came back that following night, and it was trailed and caught. You'll hear about it one of these days in the papers.

Jenks went to a sanitarium for a month (Palmer recommended his own private one) and after that he and Dorothy were married. I did a nice thing by signing him a cool million, which I can easily deduct from the taxes I am paying to beat the Axis, but I won't. Oh, yes—he tore up and burned every vestige of the notes, and he says he is forgetting the formula

little by little. I hope so.

Ann and I have been married a month and twelve days now, and yesterday I got my induction notice, so I'm off to Fort Jay in three days. Ann says she'll follow me around the country and I love it.

Mahoney is still drinking coca-colas with eggs.

Bancroft didn't believe our story when we told him that the notes had showed up safe and sound in the office, after all, but he was less skeptical after finding out Dave was in a sanitarium.

Seaside is now one of Long Island's biggest USO headquarters.

For all I know, Alonzo is still in that closet, crying out his little heart. I haven't seen him since I left on my honeymoon.

Robert is in the pantry, making a French .75 this very minute.

Finally, Palmer says that a story has to have a happy ending. I think this one has a fine, hysterically happy ending. Don't you?

TOBACCO PLANT ONE MILLION YEARS OLD

A STRANGE tobacco plant from prehistoric ages, discovered on the romantic Juan Fernandez Islands off the South American Chilean Coast, has been brought to the United States and is now growing in the botanical gardens of the University of California.

This tobacco plant that grows to tree-size survives, with other exotic plants, after its kind has been extinct elsewhere in the world for millions of years.

Exploring the Juan Fernandez Islands is like taking a trip in a time machine and stepping out millions of years ago. Cut off from the South American continent by some ancient freak geologic catastrophe, many life forms were sheltered on the islands from climatic changes and alien enemies that gradually destroyed their species on the mainland, and today are a living museum of ancient plant life for the scientifically minded to explore. There are rare tree ferns, palms, giant sunflowers and other botanical wonders tbat grew when the world was young.

"IS GOD DEAD?"

(as this war grows worse Americans are asking that question)

Well, I can say to them that God is most certainly NOT dead for I TALKED WITH GOD, and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be—all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a postcard to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 111, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1942, Frank B. Robinson.

Advertisement



"Whatsamatter?" the cop said. "See a ghost or somethin'?"

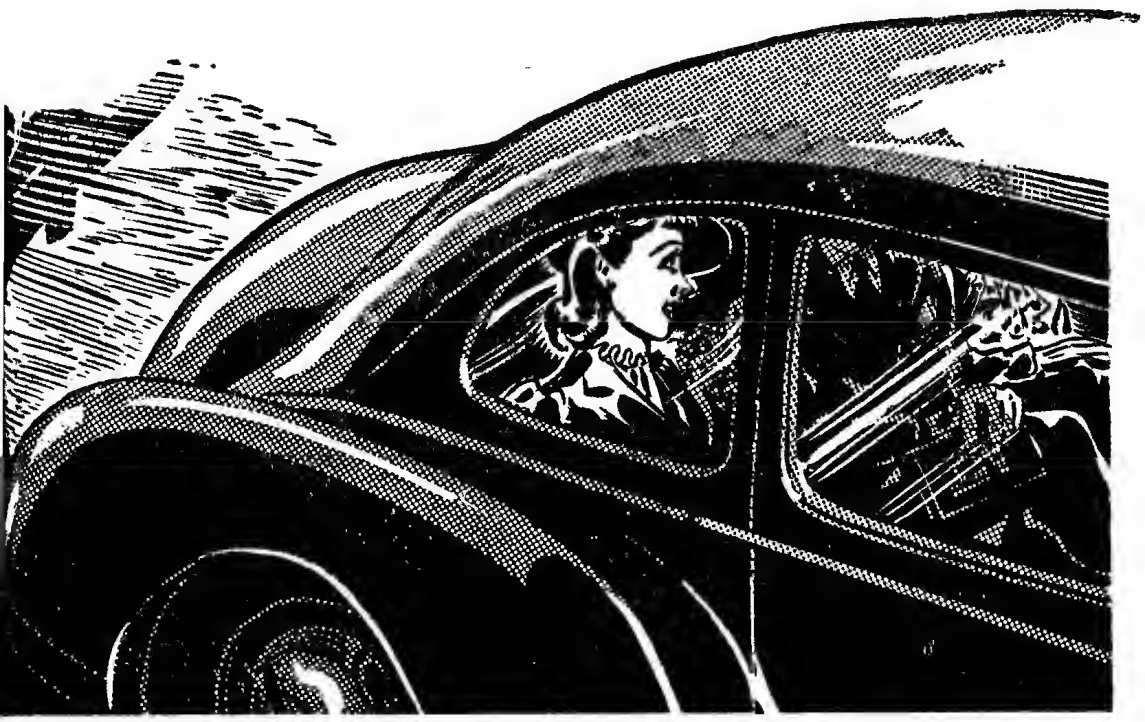
SAUNDERS' STRANGE SECOND SIGHT

by Clee Garson

THERE are pretty close to four million people in Chicago, and lots more—I am told by people who seem to know—in the United States proper.

That's why the whole thing seemed particularly strange coming as it did. Out of umpty million people in the United States and close to the previously mentioned four million inhabiting Chicago, it seems utterly inconceivable that Richard Saunders was the person Fate—or whatever occult force it was—chose to have it happen to.

Richard Saunders just isn't the sort you'd expect to find visited by psychic phenomena of any kind. He's not dark; he's blond. He's not sinister; he's stupid. He isn't a seventh son; he's an only child. And he's not descended



Parrots, lions, weasels and wolves—he saw them all. After the first shock, Saunders enjoyed it. Then he looked in a mirror . . .

from gypsies or anything of the sort, his father being one of the wealthiest, most solid manufacturers in all Chicago. He just doesn't ring the bell on any of the standard props you'd expect to find in the background of one coming into possession of powers strictly occult in nature.

Maybe the mysterious other world forces which gave him the weirdly psychic power were tired that day and got their addresses mixed. Or maybe they just did it as a lark. At any rate, the power wasn't left with young Richard Saunders for long. It was snatched away as swiftly and as inexplicably as it was granted.

I have a hunch I'm the only one, aside from Saunders himself, who knows about it. He told me it all perhaps two months after it happened. Told it to me in utter, straight faced solemnity, after first making me promise that I wouldn't think him crazy. When he'd finished he begged for some sort of an explanation that might set his mind at ease. I wasn't able to think of any then, and I still can't.

It just happened, that's all. . . .

IT was a fine, balmy morning in May, and young Saunders, his soft, thin, elegantly tended young hide attired in a blue pin-striped suit, two-toned shirt and chalk blue fedora, was piloting his long, blue streamlined roadster through the stream of Michigan Boulevard traffic on his way to work.

He had breakfasted leisurely in the sprawling twenty-two room Lake Forest shack that he called home, mentally thanking fortune for the fact that his father was out of town at some convention, and that, as a consequence, he could take his time arriving for work at the old boy's office.

It was almost ten o'clock, therefore, when young Saunders turned his roadster into the underpass off Wacker Drive and sought for someplace where he could illegally park his car.

After several minutes of snail-paced driving, Saunders spied an area which was unoccupied by virtue of a very large NO PARKING sign painted prominently upon its surface.

Triumphantly, Saunders wheeled his machine into this heaven-sent parking place, completely obscuring the sign by virtue of the fact that his roadster now covered it completely.

Chuckling at what struck him as being a remarkably shrewd maneuver, Saunders leaned forward, switched off the ignition, and put his keys in his pocket.

He was just starting to climb from the car, when the voice, hoarse and definitely angry, arrested him.

"And whatta yez think ye're doing, eh?"

Young Saunders froze. He didn't have to look up to identify that voice. Even to his limited intelligence it was a voice and phrase which could come only from the lips of—a policeman!

In that brief instant, while struggling to force a smile to his lips before turning to confront the law, Richard Saunders went through hell. A hell concerned primarily with his father's reactions if said father learned, through a police summons, that his son Richard was driving to work against strict paternal orders. Old man Saunders, being strictly of the no-pampering-come-up-the-hard-way school, often stated that the suburban morning train, if good enough for him, should most certainly be good enough for young Richard.

"I don't ever want to catch you slopping down to work in my office in that four-wheeled palace of yours!" the elder Saunders had often thundered at his son.

Sickly, now, young Saunders recalled

each reverberating roll of that phrase. And the fact that his father was out of town on a convention—which was the reason for his having dared to violate the edict—was scant consolation. If he got a ticket now, the old boy would discover it all through the summons. For the machine, though technically Richard's, was registered in his father's name.

Young Saunders realized, too, that any investigation into the parking charge would reveal, also, the damning fact of his having arrived so late for work.

"You'll start at nine and quit at five like the rest of 'em!" was another one of the senior Saunders' favorite admonishments. And here it was almost ten!

Richard Saunders finally managed a sickly, feeble smile, and summoned enough courage to turn to face the policeman who owned that mercilessly accusing voice.

And then it happened!

YOUNG Saunders turned, the pseudo-smile valiantly working the corners of his weak young mouth into something resembling a very silly leer. He turned—and confronted the huge, shaggy, angry head of a lion!

For a split second, while his own face was still less than two feet from the face of the lion, Richard Saunders goggled in gaping terror.

Then a shrill scream started in his throat. A shrill scream which emerged only as a high-pitched, bubbling wheeze.

He wanted to run. He wanted, with a terrifying desperation, to get the hell away from there as quickly as his long skinny legs could carry him.

But he couldn't move. Not an inch. And, even worse, his knees, which were so helplessly incapable of motion, seemed quite on the verge of completely refusing to support him.

"Well?" snarled the lion. "Whatcha got tuh say fer yerself, wise guy?"

And then, even through his terror, Saunders was able to see that this lion was an incredibly strange one. For it wasn't *all* lion. It was, in fact, just a lion's *head* atop the body of a policeman!

Saunders' lips moved automatically in reply.

"Wuhwuhwuhwuhwuhwuh, buhbuhbuhbuh, zuzuzuzu!" he gurgled.

"What's eatin yez?" demanded the lion-policeman truculantly. "Get this buggy outta here pronto!"

Saunders' reply was still impossibly incoherent, consisting again of a series of sounds. He slumped weakly down behind the wheel of the car, as if compelled by a hypnotizing force quite beyond him. With hands that shook wildly, he managed, somehow, to put the key in the ignition; managed to get the motor started.

He was in such a frenzy of fear that he was scarcely conscious of doing any of this. The policeman with the head of a lion—or the lion with the body of a policeman, if you prefer—stood back a pace, hands on hips, glaring balefully as the young man backed the machine out of the space.

"Git along to a parkin lot wit yez!" bellowed the lion headed policeman savagely, "And don't let me catch yez sneakin inta here agin!"

Saunders got.

He got just as quickly as the thunderously powerful motor of his streamlined roadster would carry him. Eyes glazed in wild terror, he rocketed blindly through the lower level, missing pillars and opposite bound vehicles merely through the grace of God.

And as some of the terror ebbed a trifle, some reason returned to him. Quite suddenly he was aware for the

first time that he was behind the wheel of his roadster and travelling through a dangerous web of sub-street roads at breakneck speed.

Even Richard Saunders had brains enough to realize that another mile or so of this sort of driving, or of any driving, would be suicidal in his present state of terror.

HE jammed on the brakes just as a parking lot appeared to his right. Saunders had always avoided parking lots in this vicinity because innumerable business friends of his father's kept their machines in them. But he wasn't thinking of his father now. He wasn't thinking of anything save the terrifying phenomenon of the lion-copper and the fact that he badly needed a drink.

Saunders tooted the horn, and he saw a parking-jockey, a small wiry youngster clad in puttees and a greasy uniform cap, pick up a ticket from the cashier's cash and trot out toward the roadster.

"Here's y'ticket, mister," the parking-jockey called. "I'll bring it inferyuh!"

Gratefully, young Saunders reached out for the ticket, sliding out from behind the wheel as he did so. And it was only then, with the ticket in his hand, and the parking-jockey stepping past him to slide in behind the wheel, that Saunders saw the fellow's face.

The parking-jockey, beneath his greasy uniform cap, displayed not a human head, but the head of a beaver!

Richard Saunders emitted a shout of pure terror.

The parking-jockey with the beaver head turned to look at young Saunders astonishedly.

"What's wrong, Mister?" he asked.

"N-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-nothing!" Saunders bleated. He turned then, clutching the ticket, and dashed madly away. His legs were able to move this time, and their long, wild strides ate up the ground beneath him. He found himself at the steps which led from the lower level up to the boulevard. He took the steps three at a time, emerging on the boulevard in weak and breathlessly terror.

He leaned against the railing of the Michigan Boulevard Bridge, pantingly seeking to refurbish his strength.

And then he looked around. Looked around to see the usual stream of boulevard pedestrians moving hurriedly along past him. They were all quite thoroughly human. None of them had animal heads.

Saunders told me later that he wanted to run up to any and all of these completely normal fellow human beings and shake their hands or kiss them on the cheeks. He was so grateful, tears welled in his vaguely gray eyes.

It took him fully another five minutes to gain the strength to head for the nearest bar. And when, three minutes after this, he crossed its threshold, he had already started rationalizing—to the best of his limited ability—over the incredibly terrifying phenomenon he'd been subjected to.

He was rationalizing so furiously, as a matter of fact, that when he sat down at a stool before the bar, he didn't get a glimpse of the barkeep until that gentleman approached and asked:

"What'll it be, sir?"

"Rye, double portion," Saunders answered automatically. He looked up vaguely at the barkeep. *Looked up and saw a weasel's head atop the scrawny, white aproned body of a bartender!*

The bartender-weasel combination grinned, said, "Sure thing," and turned away to mix the drink.

RICHARD SAUNDERS clung to the bar until the knuckles of his pale,

well tended hands stood out like white marbles. He opened and closed his mouth. He shut his eyes, then opened them. He shook his head drunkenly. But for some reason or another—possibly because this sort of thing was becoming monotonous, or possibly because his strictly limited imagination had spent itself—Saunders' only emotion was one of concern for his own sanity. This time, he wasn't actually afraid. He was merely stunned.

The bartender returned, planking the drink before him, and grinning with that weasel's head.

Automatically, Saunders found change for the drink, still staring popeyed at the unhappy blend of beast and barkeep.

"Something wrong?" asked the weasel head, expression changing.

Saunders shook his head.

"No," he muttered. "No. Nothing at all." He managed to tear his eyes away from the barkeep-weasel until that person had turned away to ring up the sale.

While he finished his drink, Saunders covertly studied the combination weasel-barkeep over the rim of his glass. And it was just about the time he'd finished the drink, that another customer entered the place.

This new customer was a portly, middle-aged chap—without any identifying peculiarities such as an animal's head. Thoroughly normal. He sat down, the weasel-bartender moved over to ask what he'd have, and the gentleman declared in favor of scotch.

Saunders watched the scene in fascination. The normal, middle-aged gent displayed no reactions such as one might expect from a person whose order has just been taken by a man with the head of a weasel.

Draining the last of his drink, Saunders debated for an instant on the advisability of approaching the gentleman to ask him if he didn't think it strange that the bartender had the head of a weasel. Then he decided—for obvious reasons—that such questioning would be inadvisable inasmuch as the portly gentleman didn't seem to know that he was being served by an unnatural phenomenon.

Saunders took a deep breath, rose from his stool, and left the bar.

Out on the boulevard again, he once more became part of a stream of utterly normal humanity hustling north and south about its business. But by now the double rye was setting up a warm fortification against any recurrences of hysteria or fear which his resumed rationalizations might bring on.

Saunders, with his one-cylinder mind, was doing a terrific job of selling himself an explanation of all this madness, even though he wasn't quite sure himself what the explanation was.

It never occurred to him, after his first brief wavering on the subject, to doubt his sanity. His ego, quite naturally, wouldn't tolerate that sort of reasoning for long. So beginning on the basis that he was sane and in no state of mental disorder whatsoever, he began to run the gamut of the scant possibilities left in his mind.

Sun spots got quite a kicking around. He'd read an article in a newspaper almost a week previously about sun spots, and remembered vaguely that they were responsible for all sorts of things. He tried to recall if there'd been anything in the article about such perplexing phenomena as human beings with the heads of animals, and finally had to admit despairingly that he couldn't recall any such material in the piece. So he regretfully discarded sun spots.

Nimbly, then, he ticked off in his mind the three or four most recent plays

and the half dozen most recent movies he'd viewed. None of these gave him anything to sink his teeth into, so he had to pass them on also.

He thought for a while of pinning an explanation of some sort on his eyesight, but realized after a futile five minutes of this, that he couldn't work anything plausible out of that theory.

IT is quite possible that he never would have hit on the theory that he did if he hadn't passed the huge boulevard book store windows at that moment. Passed, only to be abruptly halted by the phrase from a display poster in one of the windows which had caught his eye.

"THE ANIMAL KINGDOM," the poster proclaimed, "IS STRIKINGLY SIMILAR TO OUR OWN!"

And then the poster went on to announce that this fact would be instantly evident to anyone who purchased a copy of "The Man and The Beast" for two dollars and a half. This book, written by that eminent zoölogist, Professor P. Prawl, the poster went on to explain, drew striking socially satirical resemblances between animals and human beings. It quoted, briefly, a paragraph from the book concerning certain striking resemblances between one A. Hitler and almost any rodent.

Saunders stood before the window goggle-eyed, his heart hammering in sudden elated excitement. Here, as if handed to him on a platter by the proverbial hand of fate, was an explanation for it all!

The angry, bellowing lion head on the policeman was—to steal a phrase from the poster—nothing more than a strikingly realistic transformation of said copper into the animal kingdom.

The hard-working, always-running parking-jockey, too, was another symbolically expressed transformation. What better could he be than a beaver?

The weasel-barkeep, pinch faced and sly, also fitted nicely into this theory.

And it came to young Saunders, then, that he alone among his fellow men had, through some tremendous power of insight, the ability to see other human beings as they actually were in relation to the animal kingdom from which they were not so many centuries removed!

That was it. There was no doubt of it. He was able to see people as they would be if they reverted to origin tomorrow. Not all people, apparently. Perhaps only the people with whom he came into immediate personal contact.

Typically enough, this sudden encounter with an even remotely plausible theory was all Richard Saunders needed. His anxiety and emotional roller-coasting vanished completely to be replaced with the elated enthusiasm of a none-too-bright child with a new toy.

It never occurred to him then that he still hadn't hit upon an explanation for it all. The theory was all that he needed. And now that he had it well in hand, his eagerness to use his strange new insight became an ungovernable itch.

He looked at his watch. It was just ten-thirty. For the first time in his life he felt an urgent desire to hustle to his father's office. There, among numerous people with whom he'd been thrown into almost daily contact for over a year, he'd have a field day with this exciting new perspective. . . .

THE elevator operator in the building where his father's office was located provided Saunders with his first brief, animal analogy.

Saunders stepped into the cage, scarcely conscious of the operator's presence, engrossed in contemplation of the visual picnic he was due to have.

The operator's, "Good morning, Mr. Saunders," brought him out of the fog. "The weather's fine, no rain, eh?" the operator added.

Saunders glanced at the operator, and found himself staring at a parrot's head atop a uniformed human figure.

"Yes, the weather's swell," Saunders replied automatically.

"Nice day, swell weather, yes sir," the operator-parrot combination chanted.

"Sure is," Saunders declared.

"Sure is," echoed the weird combination.

Saunders got off at twelve. He stepped into the reception room of Saunders & Company an instant later. He heard the voice of Doris, the neat little number who operated the switchboard, chanting from her cubicle.

"No sir. He's not in. Saunders and Company. Mr. Welk? Just one moment. No sir. Saunders and Company. Just one moment."

Grinning, Saunders sauntered over to the board.

"Good morning, Doris," he called out cheerfully.

A trim pair of silken underpinnings flashed, an arm appeared around the board. Doris looked out.

"*Good morning,* Mr. Saunders!" a honeyed voice declared.

In spite of the fact that he expected nothing human, Saunders gasped. Instead of the pertly alluring features of Doris, he saw what was undoubtedly the head of but one animal—a minx!

Saunders flushed a deep crimson. He groped for the door leading to the inner offices.

"Good God, I mean, good morning!" he choked.

Saunders opened the door and stepped into the general office. The ringing of telephones and the clacking of typewriters suddenly came bedlam-like to his ears.

He took a swift glance around the several dozen employees at their desks throughout the general bullpen. They all looked normal enough, busy as usual. He started through the bullpen on the way to his own small office.

"Good morning, Mr. Saunders."

Young Saunders turned at the sound of the voice. Turned to see the meek, cardboard sleeved little figure of Cossett, the old bookkeeper, who'd turned slightly on his high stool to make his small voice heard.

Cossett presented the head of an incredibly timid gray mouse. A gray mouse with a pencil behind its ear.

"Good morning, Cossett," Saunders grinned. He continued on. Mouse-headed Cossett bent back over his work again.

A figure stepped up to Saunders. A short, stocky, barrel chested figure in shirtsleeves, completely blocking his way.

"Look, Mr. Saunders," the voice belonged to Harlan, shipping room boss, "I've had those invoices on your desk an hour. The stuff can't get through until you sign 'em. Speed it up, will you?"

Harlan's head was perfectly in order—the dogged, angry, joweled features of a bulldog. A bulldog looking very much on the verge of biting.

"Sure, sure," Saunders said swiftly, stepping around the shipping boss. "Have 'em right in." He mopped his brow as Harlan moved on. Just a little unnerved, Saunders almost bumped into the extended nether quarters of the sleek, well dressed Mr. Owens, office manager. Owens had been bending intently over the shoulder of a small, dark-haired girl who was apparently the new steno Saunders had heard they were hiring.

"Sorry, Owens," Saunders said, starting to step around.

Owens straightened up, turned startledly, saw Saunders and smiled.

"Good morning, Mr. Saunders. Just breaking in the new girl," he grinned.

On the dapper body of Owens there was a head that was unquestionably that of a wolf.

SAUNDERS' jaw went slightly slack. He nodded wordlessly, hurrying on past his office manager. He almost reached the door of his own office, but didn't quite succeed. A friendly slap on the back and a big hand on his arm arrested him.

"I heard a good one today, Dick!" a voice chortled. "It'll knock your teeth out."

Benson, the account salesman, one of the few men in the place farsighted enough to play up to young Saunders. Saunders beamed, turning to face the minor executive.

Atop Benson's stout, falstaffian body, there was the head of a hyena. Saunders stared at it in fascination, scarcely hearing the joke Benson boomed forth. The joke ended, Benson nudged him in the ribs. Hyena-like laughter broke loose from the quite hyena-like head. Benson walked off, fat body shaking with mirth.

Saunders managed to reach his office. Inside, he sat down uneasily behind his desk, running his hand across the surface of the desk nervously.

He was beginning to wonder whether or not he cared for this sort of thing. It was, he sought for a phrase, too damned starkly revealing in cases.

He hesitated when he reached for the buzzer on his desk. He didn't know whether or not he'd care to see Margaret, the spinster his father assigned to him as a secretary, under the additionally trying circumstances of her popping in with the head of a loon, or a penguin. He didn't know why penguin occurred to him. It just sort of seemed to fit. He took his hand away from the temptation of the buzzer.

Nervously, he rose. He walked to the wash cabinet, pulling his comb absentmindedly from his pocket.

In front of the cabinet mirror, Saunders raised the comb to his blond hair. An unconscious routine. One done countlessly in his own office. His eyes met his mirrored reflection.

He let out a swift, sharp, indignant yelp, leaping back in sudden astonishment, unwittingly entangling his feet in the telephone cord by his desk. He couldn't stop himself from toppling over backwards, anymore than he could have prevented his head hitting the leg of his desk. . . .

THEY brought Saunders around in less than five minutes. Which was pretty good, considering the fact that he'd been out quite completely. He had nothing worse than a lump on his head and an ache in his skull. And strangely enough, the power was gone just as suddenly as it had been given him. Everyone was normally reflected in his vision. No more animal kingdom. No more psychic insight.

Saunders was just as glad.

But he's still troubled about an explanation. He's beginning now to talk himself into believing it was all some tragic hallucination. But that explanation won't hold water with me. From all he's told me, everything fitted too well for it to be a product of his none too nimble imagination. Especially his last insight to the animal kingdom.

That last insight he couldn't have made up. For the startling phenomenon which stared back at him from his mirror, the animal head reposing quite serenely on his own shoulders, was the foolish, vacant, elongated head of a jackass!

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 6)

THERE'S big news for you fans for next month. We know that many of you remember the very popular novel by Don Wilcox called "The Whispering Gorilla." Well, Don has "rented" the character to us for a sequel, and we had David V. Reed do it for us. The reason for this is that Reed actually did work with Wilcox on the first story, and rewrote the final draft. Since his style is so much different from that of Wilcox, Don felt that a sequel done by himself would not have the same flavor. So he graciously consented to let Reed do a whole new story. Talk about cooperation between authors—this hits a new high! Which proves how far our writers will go to please the readers.

THEREFORE, next month, we present, in complete form, one of the finest novels we've read in a very long time. It will he a story that you'll remember for long years to come, and it will be the answer to your repeated requests since the Gorilla first appeared in 1939 in this magazine.

ANOTHER story we want you to he on the lookout for in next month's issue is David Wright O'Brien's short story "Yesterday's Clock." We think this one will be a candidate for the title, "best short story of tbe year."

YOU Edgar Rice Burroughs fans, don't miss the February issue of *Amazing Stories,* our sister magazine, on sale December 10. It will contain the first of a new Burroughs series called "Skeleton Men of Jupiter" and it's another series around the famous John Carter of Mars!

THE harmless little tomato is in some predicament. A Supreme Court decision in 1893 judged it to be a vegetable, while botanically speaking it is a fruit.

MOST of us remember reading in the papers a few years back, September 21, 1938, to be exact, about the famous and disastrous hurricane in New England, which will not be forgotten for many years.

West Africa has been hlamed for this phenonenon. Study of weather maps by a French meteorologist shows that a wave of low pressure in the south central Sahara desert on September 4, 1938, was joined by a northerly trade and a southwesterly monsoon as it neared the African coast at Cape Verde and also an easterly equatorial wind on the north. These three air masses interplayed to create the tropical cyclone which traveled across the Atlantic and on up the American east coast to cut across New England. Other tropical hurricanes like this renowned one prohably also have had their start in West Africa.

THE kiwi, a wingless bird native of New Zealand, is one of the strangest-looking birds now living. Its wings have degenerated to mere internal nubbins, its body is covered with long, fringy feathers that resemble hair, and it has a long bill which it uses in probing for worms and in tapping to guide it on its weak-sighted way.

It is about the size of a hen, but its eggs are ten times the size of a hen's. They weigh one-fourth as much as the hird that lays them.

The female "wears the pants" in the kiwi family. She rules the roost. The male, at least a third smaller than his mate, meekly sits on the eggs and broods the chicks. The hen takes over the defense of the nest if someone intrudes. She kicks straight forward, like an ostrich, with her large strong feet, and since her toenails are exceptionally hard and sharp she can inflict a nasty wound.

Aviators often jestingly call the non-flying ground officers of their servlce kiwis—wingless hirds.

ISISTIUS BRAZILIENSIS, is the name of a strange, wine colored shark whose whole underside shines with a weird light at night. This queer monster of the deep has twenty rows of teeth, and is found in tropical waters the world around. In common with many other marine animal spcies, it produces a phosphorescent light. It will keep luminous for several hours after it is dead.

The largest sharks are the least dangerous. These monsters known as basking sharks are either so goodnatured or stupid that they never offend or molest anyone, and if attacked they only try to escape. Tbey cannot even swim very fast.

The real "man-eaters" are the tiger sharks or carcharodons. They are found in almost all warm seas and sometimes appear off our own southern coasts. They are without question the most dangerous, but fortunately, they are nowhere abundant.

YOUR editors have secured a reprint novel for this magazine that will knock your ears off. We won't tell you yet what it is, but it'll appear within three or four months. As it stands, it is much too long for our magazine, and must be boiled down and revised to modern tempo. We don't know yet which author we'll pick to do this ticklish job, hut you can bet we'll give it to a man who knows what he's doing. Watch for announcements concerning this story, because it'll be something you simply must not miss. It will be approximately 120,000 words of a story you'll never forget!

Which is a very good place to close the notebook for tbis month. *Rap*



LEFTY FEEP CATCHES HELL

by Robert Bloch

Lefty not only went to hell; he brought back a piece. But it did not show until he lost his pants

I HARDLY could wait for my meal to arrive over at Jack's Shack. It had been a tough day, and I was hungry—hungry enough to eat one of his tough steaks.

When the food arrived, I hastily grabbed a bottle of ketchup and flung it over the meat. A large gob splattered up against my nose.

"Damn it!" I muttered.

"Such language!" said a voice at my ear.

I turned my ketchup-decorated nose up and peered into the face of Lefty Feep.

The angular man who knows all the angles was surveying me with a look of extreme disapproval.

"What's wrong?" I inquired.

Feep draped himself in a chair at my side. He made little clucking sounds in his throat.

"Mustn't say such things," he said.

"I never knew you objected to profanity," I told him.

"It is not safe to say such things," Feep told me. "They are liable to come true."

I stared at Lefty Feep. This sounded very odd. I wondered if he had been drinking.

"Where in blazes have you been?" I snapped.

"Everywhere," said Feep.

"Where everywhere?"

"Like you say. Everywhere in blazes."

"What in perdition are you talking about?"

"Everything. Everything in perdition," Feep answered.

"The hell you say!"

"That's right. The hell, I say."

"Listen, Lefty," I sighed. "I'm having one devil of a time understanding you."



It was a hell of a place to be—in fact it WAS hell!

"That is nothing. You should see the time the devil had understanding me," Feep grinned.

I looked Lefty Feep straight in the eye. "Are you trying to tell me you've talked with Satan?" I demanded.

"Satanly."

"Feep, that's a lousy pun. What kind of a gag is this anyway?"

"No gag at all," declared Feep. "I am on the level about the devil."

"You talked to him, eh?"

"Do you think I would lie to you?" Feep accused.

I didn't answer that one. But there was no need to. For Lefty Feep suddenly gripped my collar.

"It is lucky for you that I'm here," he announced. "I got a tale to tell about Hell."

I broke free.

"Some other time, Lefty. Right now I can't stop to listen. I've got a date with an angel."

"Tell her to go play a harp. You got a date with a fiend," declared Lefty Feep. "What happens to me makes Dante's *Inferno* look like a kindergarten picnic."

"But—"

Lefty complied. He butted me back into my chair.

"You gotta hear this," he breathed.

"It looks that way," I sighed.

Fixing me with a devilish leer, Lefty Feep gulped, gave his tongue a practice flip, and plunged into his story.

I HAVE a date with an angel the other night myself. If she is not exactly an angel, at least she is one of the heavenly bodies.

To be specific and terrific, I am hep to step out with a little number by the name of Kitten Carter. Her real name is Clarice, but she is called Kitten because of her lovely puss.

When I meet Kitten at first she is working in a Five and Ten, but gets kicked out because she cannot remember the prices. So I advise her to get a job in a defense plant, and that is where she is now planted.

Naturally Kitten is most happy about all this, and when I invite her out for the evening she agrees at once.

In fact I am just talking to her in a phone booth, but somebody else wants to use it and we have to get out.

"Let's us go to a restaurant, Lefty," suggests Kitten, in her elegant manner, "And put the chew on some goo."

I smile sweetly and nod, but I do not feel so good about it. Because at the moment I am as broke as a Japanese promise. I am in a fine way to take a ginch out and show her a good time. All I got in my pockets are a couple of pawnshop tickets, and who wants to take a dame to a pawnshop?

But if Kitten Carter wants to eat, she is going to eat. I will figure out an angle.

So I steer her down the street and pretty soon we are in front of a spaghetti joint.

"How about some of that?" I inquire. Kitten nods her head, and we go in.

The place is not exactly snooty, being a sort of cross between a dive and a joint, with just a touch of dump about it. But it looks cheap enough, so we sit down at one of the tables and brush macaroni crumbs off with the menu.

We are the only customers in the place, unless the flies are spending money tonight, so we get quick service. In less than an hour the one waiter in the dive figures out that we might want something to eat. He power-dives over at a speed of at least 2 miles per hour.

"What's it gonna be?" he asks.

"Probably ptomaine from the looks of this place," I answer. "But we'll take some spaghetti."

He gives me a look from the black

book. I stare right back. The waiter is a little, shrivelled-up specimen in a tuxedo that isn't pressed since it comes from the funeral parlor, back in 1906. He is very dark and swarthy, and there is five o'clock shadow on his face, and also under his eyes. But mostly he is a walking mustache. The bristle under his nose would make any janitor grab him, turn him upside down, and use him for a broom.

But he forces a very anemic smile and takes my order and dashes away at his usual speed, like a racing snail that gets retired for old age.

KITTEN sits there and makes with her mouth, and I sit there and scurry over a worry. This waiter is going to be a tough customer when he finds out I am a broke customer. He looks like a member of the Bomb-Thrower's Union Number 7, Mussolini Local.

More likely he is a Black Hand. This I decide when I get a look at his fingers as he comes back with the spaghetti.

I stop worrying for a while and begin to tangle with the spaghetti—which is very good, if you like shoelaces with vaseline.

Kitten and I are all wound up in our meal, and the waiter stands off at one side watching us trying to untie the Boy Scout knots in the noodles.

After we bounce the last meatball down our throats, he comes over. This time he really moves fast, because he is bringing the bill.

I take a look and gulp. Then I gulp again. The price for two orders of spaghetti is $4.50.

"What gives this $4.50?" I inquire.

He slides a sneer out from under his mustache.

"Cover charge," he answers.

"I am not buying any covers," I explain. "All I want is the spaghetti."

"The price is $4.50," he comes back.

"Well," I sigh, "I have not got $4.50."

"So?" He glares at me. "Then you gotta see the cashier."

"All right with me." I walk over to the cashier's desk.

He follows me and takes off his apron, then slips around the desk.

"What you want?" he asks, like he never sees me before.

"Why, the cashier."

"That's me."

"You're the cashier, too?"

"Why not?"

"Well I am still the same guy who hasn't got $4.50."

He glares again.

"You insist, ha? Then I call the boss."

"Call him anything you like."

"Follow me." He turns around and walks back to an office marked *Manager*. I trail along and go in.

The same waiter is sitting behind the desk.

"You're the boss, too?"

"I am the boss," he growls. "And I want $4.50."

This is very embarrassing to me. I think of Kitten sitting back there at the table, wondering where I go. I also think of something else when I see this guy pulling a little blackjack out of the desk drawer and twirling it around his head. He is not going to play bean-bag with me, I guess.

"Can't we settle this thing peacefully?" I suggest.

"$4.50 settles everything."

I am stuck with this clip-joint price. All I can do is shake my head. Also my knees, because he gets up and starts to wave his blackjack.

All at once he stops.

"I give you your choice," he says. "Either I break your neck or else—"

"Or else what?" I snap, hoping to

make a better deal. "Maybe just both legs, huh?"

"Or else you can work out the price of the meals."

"Work it out?"

"Sure? Why not? I am tired of all this business," he says. "Suppose you work here until 12 o'clock and we call it a deal?"

THIS sounds better. It is already after 9 p. m. and I am amazed at such a generous offer. Also I cannot understand why he has such a grin on his face, when there is hardly enough room for the mustache.

"I'll do it," I agree.

We turn around and walk back.

Kitten is standing up at the table.

"Hurry up, Lefty," she pouts. "Let's get out of here. I want to go places and do things tonight."

"Well," I gulp, "I don't know. I am sort of going to stick around here until midnight."

"But I want to go out stepping like you promised me," she says.

"Let me explain—" I begin. Then a hand pushes me out of the way.

"One side," says the waiter-cashier-boss. He bows real low and the bristles of his mustache dust his knees.

"I will have much pleasure in escorting such a beautiful lady as you," he gurgles, giving Kitten the eye. "I admire you. You have the face of an artist. Let us therefore go out and paint the town red."

"Why you—" I say. I have a swell name all picked out for him, but I never get a chance to express it, because Kitten interrupts me.

She giggles at the waiter.

"I accept your invitation," she smirks.

"But Kitten—"

"It serves you right, Lefty Feep," she tells me. "If you are going to stand me up, I might as well start toddling with this kind gentleman."

Kitten is very dull in the skull, understand? Because anybody taking one good look at this fink wouldn't walk anywhere with him except as an escort to the electric chair. He is rough, tough, and gruff, and a ticket to the hot seat is just about his speed.

I try to tell Kitten all this in a few short sentences, but the waiter just taps his hip pocket where the blackjack is and I shut up.

"I am the boss," he whispers. "You work for me until 12 midnight, understand? So no back talk from the hired help."

That is why I only stand there when he walks out with Kitten. I give her a little smile and wave my waiter's apron at her, but no response. Except that a piece of spaghetti on the apron hits me in the eye.

And there I am, stuck as a waiter in a spaghetti jetty until midnight.

It is quiet. It is lonely. Nothing is buzzing but the flies. My girl jilts me. I am broke. And on top of it, the spaghetti!

On top of my poor stomach, I mean. Because all at once I get a very peculiar feeling. I am suddenly quite dizzy. Everything starts whirling around.

I start to sit down. That is all I do, just start. Because I don't sit down. I fall down.

Fall on the floor.

And *further*.

I get the feeling that I fall *through* the floor.

Of course I am unconscious, but I have that horrible feeling of falling. Dropping down, down, down.

All at once there is a bump, and I wake up. I blink my eyes.

IT SEEMS I am standing in a dark, dingy cavern. I blink again, be-

cause after all the spaghetti joint is dark and dingy.

But this place is different. Worse. Nothing around me but rocks and a reddish light.

Besides, it is extremely warm here.

I turn my head and notice a guy standing next to me. It is quite dim and I cannot see him, but misery loves company. So I give him a nod.

"Hotter than hell here, isn't it?" I remark.

"Can't be," says a deep voice.

"What do you mean?"

"Can't be hotter than hell. This *is* Hell!" says the voice.

"Oooooogle!" I tell him. And for a very good reason. Looking close, I see his face.

It is a red face, and it does not look natural to me. In fact it would only look natural on a bottle of Pluto Water. The face is equipped with slanted black eyes and a long mouth.

The mouth has white teeth as big as watch-charms.

The face grins at me and I shrink back. I get a blast of hot breath, like brimstone. I recognize it.

Hellatosis!

Sure enough, I am standing next to a fiend! The thing is red and scaly, like dishwater hands, only all over. And he gives me a scare and a stare at the same time.

"You're being sent for," he tells me in a voice that rumbles like volcanoes.

"Me? Sent for?"

"He wants to see you."

"Who?"

"Who in Hell do you suppose?"

I shiver. It is true, after all—those predictions people are always making about where I am going to wind up. I am dead and I am on the dirty end of the Styx.

"Come along," says the fiend.

He pulls me over the cavern floor.

I do not keep my grip when I think about the trip. We go along through the bowels of the earth, if you pardon the expression, and all around me is this awful heat. I do not see any flames, but I can feel them on the other side of the rocky walls.

I can also hear sounds. Crackling noises of fire. A lot of screams and laughing. The whole thing is like a Girl Scout marshmallow roast, only on a grand scale.

"What goes on there?" I ask the fiend.

But he does not answer. He hops along the ground ahead of me like a skinny red monkey, and I follow like an organ-grinder. Only I would not pick up any pennies if I could, because they will be plenty hot at this temperature.

"Where are we going?" I gurgle.

"Short cut," cackles the fiend. "Keep moving."

I take this advice. It is so warm that if I stand still on this ground I will give myself the hot foot.

The fiend doesn't worry, because I notice he has cloven hoofs instead of sports shoes. I am busy noticing things this trip, and every time I notice something new I shiver again, in spite of the heat.

BUT at last we round a bend in the cavern, and we stand in a big chamber. It is nice and bright here because some obliging guy sets the joint on fire, or something. The walls shoot flames out and the floor is just a lake of leaping crimson. I take one look and get ready to sing *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes*.

I take another look and then wish smoke *would* get in them. So I wouldn't have to see the figure sitting on a rock in the middle of the pool of flames.

It is the devil, naturally. Or unnaturally. Why bother with words? I

can't get them out anyway, with my heart in my mouth.

He is perched on the crag in the center of the roaring blast, smiling at me.

I groan right back at him.

Satan has diamond-bright eyes, a heart-shaped mouth, a spade beard, and a club foot. Quite a card.

More exactly, he looks like the devil. And he is.

He stares at me out of his deep eyes for a long moment.

I just wait, hopping up and down to keep from frying my toes.

"Well I'll be blessed," he says, at last. "You must be—"

Just then another fiend comes out of a cavern at one side.

"Please, Sir," he begins.

The devil frowns. "What are you horning in here for?"

"Well," says the fiend. "It's about those California people who get here yesterday."

"California people? What's with them?"

"They don't like our climate."

"Ha! Go back and let it rain pitchforks for a while," says Satan.

Then he turns to me.

"You must be Regretti," he says.

"Regretti? Who's Regretti? I'm Lefty Feep, and I want to know why in Hell I'm in Hell."

"But Regretti is the one I send for," snaps the devil. "He must come when I command him. It's a duty! I own his soul!"

"Regretti? Is he the guy who runs a spaghetti parlor?" I ask.

"Correct."

"And he sells his soul to you? So that's why I get here." It begins to dawn on me now. I yell out above the crackling of the flames.

"You are cheated when you get a customer like Regretti," I tip him off. "From what I see of him he was a lousy soul, and is probably all heel."

"That's my business," the devil comes back. "The soul-buying business. I'm in it quite a while now—ever since the days of old Doc Faust, one of my first customers. And I know a bargain is a bargain. When I send for Regretti he ought to come. He must obey me."

"But I'm not Regretti," I remind him.

"Then why are you here?"

"Damned if I know."

"That's an idea."

THE devil snaps his fingers. There is a crackling noise, and a book appears in his lap. A black book. He squints at it. Then he calls into the air. "What's wrong out there? I ask for the letter F. Fee, to be exact. Send me the right volume."

The first book disappears.

"Curse those bookkeepers of mine," he grumbles. "Ah, here we are. Just a moment please."

Another book flashes into view. He opens it with his long red claws moving over the pages. The flames light up for his convenience. He reads and shakes his head. He closes the book.

"No," he announces. "You are wrong. You are not damned. At least your name isn't in the book."

I am not altogether disappointed at being left out of Satan's hit parade. I smile, but he shakes his head. The horns waggle.

"Very peculiar," he grunts. "Lefty Feep comes when I ask for Regretti. Why?"

Then I understand.

"I am working in Regretti's place until midnight," I suggest.

"How so?"

I explain about the deal I make to pay for my meal.

Satan smiles.

"Of course," he says. "Well that's splendid. Splendid! Matter of fact, there's a little job or two lined up for Regretti. If you're taking his place until midnight you can do the work for him. Temporarily you're one of my fiends, you know."

"Wait a minute!" I object. "I don't want to stay here in Hell."

"And why not, may I ask?"

"I can't stand it here! I can't stand all these imps and fiends and demons."

"What about gargoyles?"

"I use Listerine."

"Well, you aren't going to stay in Hell," the devil tells me, tugging at his goatee. "I have a job for you. I always find work for idle hands to do."

I stare at the hellish fires around me.

"What's cooking?" I ask.

"Sinners, mostly."

"I mean, what's the job?"

"It's an assignment back on Earth," he says. "In fact, you will return to exactly the same spot you came from. You will do what Regretti should do, under my orders."

"Do what?"

"When you get there you will understand. I will send the message to you in your own mind. Saves bother of instructions." The devil grins. "Ready to leave?"

"You bet I am."

"Good. Oh, one other thing, Mr. Feep." He still grins.

"It occurs to me that you may try to deceive me and not carry out my orders."

This occurs to me, also, and I blush now to be found out.

"But," says Satan, "I will take care of that. You see, I will give you a little token to carry around. And whenever you have an urge to disobey me, the token will remind you that you are my servant—until midnight tonight, when Regretti takes over again."

"Token? What token?"

"You'll see when you look around. Remember the old saying—'Satan, get thee behind me.' Well, that's the kind of a token you'll carry."

"What is all this?" I ask.

THE devil stands up. "No time to talk. Got a lot of jobs on the fire. Back you go to Earth, Lefty Feep. And if you don't carry out my orders—there'll be Hell to pay!"

There is a deep rumble.

Satan disappears.

So do I.

I am falling again. But this time I am falling *up*.

Way, way up. I end up, standing on my feet. Right back in the restaurant.

I blink. Same place. Still vacant. I stand in the same spot. It is all a dream. All this stuff about meeting the devil, getting assigned to a job, getting a token—all a dream.

Or is it?

That token, now. I'm supposed to look *behind* me.

I look behind me very slowly. And I see something.

A tail!

A tail attached to *me!*

It is about four feet long, quite thin, and the color is a distinct pink. On the end is a sort of a bud, like a plant has. That is where a spike is supposed to grow, I figure.

As I look at the tail it wags at me in a very friendly way. But I do not feel so friendly towards this tail. Not that I don't like tails, understand. I think they are fine on dress suits. But not on me!

But this one is on me, because it's the devil's token. Yes, that's my tail and I'm stuck with it. Or will be, if the spike grows out.

Naturally I do not wish to walk

around until midnight with my tail dragging. It will attract comment. So I reach back and smuggle it into the rear of my trousers.

"Satan get thee behind me," I yap, like the devil says.

Now that I have my token, I begin to wonder about those duties I am supposed to perform. But I do not wonder long.

A thought flashes through my noggin.

"Calling Lefty Feep. Calling Lefty Feep. A man is coming into the spaghetti parlor. Ply him with liquor and make a drunkard out of him. That is all."

No sooner do I get this message than the door opens and a personality lurches in.

He is a huge, broadshouldered bozo with straw-colored hair to match the straw behind his ears. He wears a mail-order catalogue suit that makes me think he must study his catalogue where the light is dim, because it is three sizes too small for a Boy Scout.

This big hick gives me a smile and plops down in a chair.

"Gotta drink, buddy?" he asks.

I realize this must be the fink the devil wants me to drive to drink. Apparently it is going to be an easy trip.

"I'm a stranger in town," booms the hick, with a grin. "I want a little excitement. How about that drink?"

So I flip my waiter's apron on, scurry around in back, and return with a glass and a bottle.

HE grabs the bottle and starts to throttle it. I hold out the glass. He shakes his head.

"I don't want any souvenirs," he says. "Just a drink." And tips the bottle.

"But don't you drink out of a glass?" I ask.

"I should waste my time with glasses?" he chuckles. "Me—F. Bronson Johnson, from Wisconsin?"

Mr. F. Bronson Johnson, from Wisconsin then goes gurgle-gurgle-gurgle.

I stand there and watch.

"Bring another bottle, pal," he booms. "Got lotsa money."

Right then and there I rebel. For years I watch these poor suckers come to town, go into bars for a good time, and end up on their ears—with their dough gone. I do not like the way cab drivers and bartenders and come-on girls clip these hayseeds.

I can see what will happen to this goof. He will get bottle-dizzy and then he will start out to tour the joints, and by morning he will be parked in an alley someplace.

A nice guy, too. Probably with a wife and kids back in Oshkosh, or wherever. Just out for a good time vacation.

Well, Lefty Feep is not going to put the hooks into any small town clown, no matter what the devil wants.

"No more drinks," I tell him.

Then it happens.

Somebody tugs my tail.

I turn around. There is no one behind me.

But my tail is being jerked, hard!

Of course—it is like the devil warns me. If I try to disobey, he will see to it that I step back into line. So when I go against him, my tail twists.

"Ouch!" I comment, as the tail is pulled.

"Come on, how about another bottle?" insist the guy.

I am on the spot. If I give it to him, he is a goner. But if I don't, the devil will see to it that I wind up with a terrific pain in a most unsatisfactory place.

Right now my tail is being yanked very insistently. I must make up my mind.

Then I get an idea.

"All right, I'll mix you another," I tell my customer. I run back and drag out a fresh bottle, open it, and pour out a glass. I bring it back and let F. Bronson Johnson gargle with it.

He gets it down.

It gets him down.

F. Bronson Johnson leans back in his chair, gives me a big wink, and then falls over on his face. Out like a lout.

I pick him up and lay him in a booth to cool off, and I am very happy about the whole thing because I double-cross the devil.

I do not wish this oaf to become a drunkie, but unless I give him a drink the devil gets mad.

So I compromise. I give him a drink with a Mickey Finn in it. The devil doesn't know. My tail stops being twisted. F. Bronson Johnson is safe on ice for the night, and everybody is better off.

I GET to thinking about this Regretti, on the devil's pay roll, and wonder whether Satan makes him pull off a lot of jobs like this. Maybe he doesn't care for the work and is glad I take his place for a few hours.

Regretti has no tail, but he probably must obey orders just the same, or be dragged down to purgatory and barbecue over some brimstone.

I wonder what he is up to now—with Kitten Carter. All at once I remember he is out squeezing my tomato. And I am stuck here.

Or am I?

Just as I get this thought, another short-wave arrives from Purgatory.

"Calling all fiends. Calling all fiends. Regretti and Kitten Carter are at the Outside Inn. Regretti is pumping defense plant information out of Kitten. Go and help him. That is all."

That is all, is it? That is all—Regretti is trying to get military secrets out of my girl and that is all. Suddenly I realize that Regretti is not only a servant of Satan, but probably an Axis agent as well. Or as bad.

Naturally, the devil and the Axis have a lot in common. But—I am supposed to go and help Regretti!

"The hell I will," I say to myself.

Immediately I get a pain in the—I mean, my tail starts to hurt. It is twisted. Severely.

"No," I mutter, gritting my teeth. "I won't go!"

The tug on my tail is harder.

"I won't go," I gasp. "If I do, my conscience will hurt me more than my tail."

I stand there, gritting my teeth. But not for long. Something seems to grab me from behind and drag me across the floor!

Before I know it, I am going backwards out the door. My tail is being jerked along and I follow after. I am on the street, sliding down backwards.

"Hey!" I object, with a mild scream.

But there I go, wagging my tail ahead of me. There is nothing to do but turn around and walk over to the Outside Inn.

The Outside Inn is a penthouse dance palace on the hotel roof down the street. It is high up, but so are the prices. I can imagine Regretti sitting there with Kitten and plying her with liquor. He is probably stroking his mustache and pouring out the old Italian balm.

And here I am, on my way to help him. I am being led by the nose, as it were—only in reverse.

I glance at my watch and see it is after 11 p. m. There is less than one hour to go before I am free. But in that time I am still a slave.

I go through the lobby, glad my tail is concealed, and take the elevator up to the Outside Inn.

UP on the roof the band is blasting away, the waiters are scurrying around, and the customers are banging bunions on the dance floor. It is a crowd, but loud.

I look around the tables and then I spot a familiar face. Kitten. She is leaning over her glass and talking to a a guy who seems to be hiding behind a potted plant.

I take another look and recognize Regretti and his mustache.

The two of them have their heads together. She is moving her lips and he is wiggling his ears. It is like the devil's shortwave says—she is spilling the beans to Regretti. And he is taking the beans to make soup for Axis saboteurs.

I am supposed to help him.

But when I look at poor Kitten, all excited because she is stepping out, innocently telling him about her factory job and what they are making, I haven't got the heart.

"Tail or no tail," I mutter. "I am going to put an end to this."

I dash across the floor until I get to the table.

Regretti and the girl look up.

"Hello, Lefty," giggles Kitten. "I am having such a swell time telling Mr. Regretti about my job and things."

"Aha!" says Regretti, pushing his words out from under his cookie-duster. "It is you, Feep."

He scowls, but I just stand there. "What are you doing here? Our agreement is that you take my place until midnight. Your time isn't up yet."

"Yes," I nod. "But yours is, Regretti. I know what you're up to now. And I know what you will be up to in five minutes from now, unless you stop it."

"What's wrong?" flutters Kitten Carter.

"He must be—how you call it?—nuts," says Regretti, faking a smile.

"You know what I mean, " I yell. "Come on, Regretti, stand up and let me knock you down."

This proposition does not seem to appeal to him. Regretti does not stand up. Instead he trips me. When I try to get up he signals to a couple bozos I do not notice before. They are sitting at another table. These two tough hoods rush over and pick me up by the arms.

A waiter wanders by. Regretti smiles.

"This gentleman falls on the dance floor," he explains. "I will take him into the lounge and dust him off."

This is just what happens. Before Kitten can object and before I can wriggle free, I am carried into the lounge.

Regretti follows me.

"So you know what I am," he sneers, standing there while the two hoods hold me down. "Well, in that case I must do what I tell the waiter. I must dust you off."

He pulls out the blackjack.

"Wait, boss," says one of the hoods. "This is a high-toned jernt, see? No violence. Can't we cool this hothead a little easier?"

"Cool him off?" says Regretti. Then he grins.

"Maybe he will cool off without his trousers," he says.

"Hey!" I squawk. "Please, boys, not that!"

BUT it is that. The two hoods turn me upside down and dump me out of my pants. I try to squirm and hide my tail, but Regretti sees it and grabs the end.

"Well look on this!" he chuckles. "Our friend is part monkey."

"The missing link," guffaws one of the hoods.

"This makes it simple," says Regretti. "We leave this ape here in the men's lounge. He will not come out on the dance floor without his trousers. Especially not with this peculiar caudal appendage. If he behaves, we give him his trousers back at midnight."

"O.K., boss," says the second hood.

Regretti flashes me a private look. He understands what happens to me, all right.

"Do not interfere," he whispers. "Our bargain is for midnight. Until then you serve the devil in my place—and you serve him by keeping out of our plans. Take this tail of yours and sit on it."

He leaves. The hoods follow. I watch them go, and my pants with them.

I am left in the lounge.

I look at my watch. Fifteen minutes to go.

But fifteen minutes is a long time. A long time to sit in a men's lounge trying to hide a tail.

Five minutes is enough for me. I pace up and down, with that damnable tail dragging the floor behind me and sweeping up cigarette butts. I am not used to it and almost step on the end when I turn around.

Suddenly a guy comes in. I freeze against the wall. He holds the door open.

I see the dance floor beyond. I see Regretti and the hoods escorting Kitten Carter to the elevator.

They are double-crossing me! Leaving in advance!

A thought flashes. They are probably taking Kitten Carter to their headquarters to really force information out of her! The two hoods must be dumb stooges and not know Regretti is an Axis agent, but they are helping just the same.

But I am stuck here without pants. I can't run out across the dance floor with a tail. I will be disgraced. If Kitten sees me she will misunderstand completely.

It is horrible.

But—if I do not follow, who knows what will happen? Regretti gets his information and probably disposes of Kitten. I reach into my coat pocket and breathe a sigh. There is a penny there. I take it out and flip it.

"Heads or tails," I whisper.

It comes up tails.

A minute later the Outside Inn gets a new addition to its regular floor show when a half-naked bozo runs out of the lounge with a large pink tail waving the air behind him.

I slide for the elevator, but too late. It closes its door just as I reach it, and Kitten and the walking mustache are gone.

Meanwhile I am creating quite a little screamfest around me. Men are pointing indelicately and women are staring. A couple of waiters form a flying wedge with a "No Dogs Allowed" look on their faces.

I went out.

THERE is a stairway at one side. That's all I want to know. If it is not for my tail I would slide down the banisters. As it is, I leap to the stairs and start stepping. On the second flight down I am slowed up.

My tail is pulling me back!

Naturally—the devil must know I am out to hinder his plans. So he is sending me a reminder.

I tug away and manage another flight. I must hurry!

But the tail pulls harder. I can hardly make it. Three flights later I am just crawling down. And Regretti and the girl must be escaping.

I have six flights to go. I try to yank free of the tail, but I am stuck.

I pull it up in the air in front of me. I grit my teeth. Then I sink my teeth into the tail and hold it tight.

It hurts, but I can run. I do run.

When I get to the last two flights, running isn't fast enough. So I throw myself down the rest of the stairs, with the tail wrapped around my waist.

A sort of tailspin, you might call it.

I land in a heap at the bottom and pick myself up. I dash through the lobby. There is no one outside. Then I notice the alley to my left. I run for it.

Sure enough, there is Regretti and Kitten standing by the door of a car.

"Stop!" I suggest loudly.

Regretti wheels and snarls. He pulls out his blackjack and waves it.

I make a dive for him.

But I don't quite reach him. Because the two hoods step out of the shadows and grab my arms. They hang on tight and lift my feet off the ground. I am helpless, kicking and punching. But Regretti stands in front of me and I can't reach him.

"Ha!" he laughs. "You again!"

Kitten stares at me in horror.

"Lefty," she gasps. "Lefty—you—why, what in the world—oooh—"

I blush.

Regretti grabs her arm.

"Come on, never mind the freak show," he sneers.

I dangle in the air.

He turns. And then I make up my mind. I grab him. The hoods hold me, but I hold Regretti.

For a moment we struggle, and then I hear it. The clock, striking twelve.

Regretti hears it. He gives a little moan. But it is too late.

AS THE last note dies away there is a little crackle. Just a puff of smoke, as though somebody shoots a flashlight picture.

But when the smoke clears away, Regretti is gone.

The two hoods take one look and then take one fast powder away from there.

Kitten does not know what happens, because she faints when I grab Regretti.

Me, I look around and give a sigh of relief.

My tail disappears. On the stroke of twelve it is gone. I see my trousers lying on the ground and put them on again. They fit much better now.

Then I grab Kitten, hail a taxi, and take her home. She is still out.

When we arrive she wakes up.

"Here we are," I say.

She gives one look at me and screams. "Oooooh—it's you!" Kitten Carter jumps out of the cab and runs away.

But I sit back and smile as we drive off.

Everything works out for the best. Kitten is sore at me, but I find out she is just a chatterbox, so it is all right with me. I lose my tail and cheat the devil out of his due. That is also all right.

Regretti gets yanked to blazes at midnight, on account of failing in his job. It is like I figure before—if he does not carry out orders Satan takes his soul.

So there will be no sabotage and that is the end of my adventure. I lose a girl, but get my pants. My tail is finished.

* * *

LEFTY FEEP sat back in his seat and favored me with a toothy smile.

I shook my head.

"Well?" he asked.

"Really, Lefty," I muttered. "That's just about the most outlandish yarn you've ever handed me."

"Diabolical is the word for it," Feep agreed. "But I can prove it is true.

Because my tail is now gone, see?"

He started to get up and turn around, but I hastily waved my hand.

"That won't be necessary," I told him. "I will take your word for it that your tail is gone. That is, if you ever had one."

"Of course I have one," Feep flashed indignantly. "It is like I say. I go to hell, I see the devil, he gives me orders and a tail, I foil Regretti. It is all very clear to me."

"Clear isn't the word for it," I sighed. "To me it's thicker than a fruitcake and much nuttier."

"What don't you understand?" Feep challenged.

"Well, you say you grabbed this Regretti in the alley while he was trying to escape."

"Right."

"But his two thugs were holding your arms behind your back, weren't they?"

"Right. But I grab Regretti and choke him just the same."

"How?" I snapped.

"Why, with my tail, of course!"

Lefty Feep grinned like a fiend. "That is how I really double-cross the devil, see?" he chuckled. "I grab Regretti with my tail and hold him there until midnight comes. You see, that is the whole moral of my story. Fight the devil with his own weapons. You'll see, like I do, that everything comes out all right at the end."

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"You see?" squeaked the little man. "I told you this would happen!"

MISTER TROUBLE

by DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

THE Brandon Avenue Station wasn't doing much business the night the little guy waltzed in to announce he wanted to be locked up for twenty-four hours.

But even at that, the desk sergeant blinked twice and almost swallowed his chewing tobacco as the little guy's scared, squeaky voice repeated his request.

"I wish, Officer, to be incarcerated in your jail here," was the way the little guy put it.

The desk sergeant, whose name was Corbett and who was equipped with the usual thick neck and thick skull, was sadly lacking in a sense of humor. He glared at the wispy little guy with the too-big celluloid collar and the sack-fitting blue serge suit.

"And who duh yez think ye're kidding?" Desk Sergeant Corbett demanded truculently.

The little guy's mild, watery gray eyes grew even damper. His chin—what little there was of it—began to tremble. He swallowed hard, and his Adam's apple bobbed in his scrawny neck like a darning egg in a sock.

"I am not trying to be facetious, Officer," he protested quaveringly. "I wish you would confine me behind bars for twenty-four hours."

Desk Sergeant Corbett thought of a number of things to say to the smart-alecky little guy, all of them profane. But like a good policeman, Corbett held his tongue until he was certain the little guy wasn't an Alderman's relative.

"Who are yez?" the desk sergeant demanded in a tone clearly indicating he would brook no lies.

"I am Harold Hemple," said the little guy.

While searching his mind—brain might be a better word—to place the name, the desk sergeant drove to the point.

"And why do yez want to be locked up?"

Little Mr. Hemple was literally a bad dreamer. As such he was useful—until genealogy took a hand



"Something terrible will happen if I am not," said little Harold Hemple.

Feeling himself slipping farther and farther behind in all this, the desk sergeant nevertheless managed a standard reply.

"What will happen to yez?"

Harold Hemple's sad, patient face became even more pathetically morose as he tried to correct the desk sergeant's misapprehension.

"Nothing will happen to me, Officer," he declared. "I didn't mean that. I only meant that something terrible will happen to another person or persons."

"And what is this terrible something?" Desk Sergeant Corbett asked almost wildly.

Mr. Harold Hemple spread his small hands vaguely to either side. Pain came to his watery gray eyes and he gulped again before answering.

"I don't know," he squeaked helplessly.

"Yez don't know!" Desk Sergeant Corbett thundered, the veins in his fat red neck bulging. "An' I suppose yez don't know the names of the person or persons who's gonna have all this happen to 'em!"

Mr. Harold Hemple nodded sadly.

"Yes, sir," he admitted, "I don't."

DESK SERGEANT CORBETT had a sudden crystal clear insight into the emotion which makes homicide inevitable. His big hands gripped the corners of the blotter before him, and he glared apoplectically at the now cowering figure of Mr. Hemple.

"Yez have come to the wrong place, little man," the desk sergeant bellowed. "Yez are lookin' fer the boobyhatch, not a police station. Now get along wit yez before I book yez fer malish'us mischuf!"

Mr. Hemple held his ground, even though fear was plainly in his eyes. He wet his thin lips, gulped again.

"That would be fine, Officer," Mr. Hemple squeaked whitely. "Book me on any charge you like, but pleeease put me behind bars!"

Desk Sergeant Corbett let out a trumpeting shout.

"Masterson, Carroll, Waterman!" he bellowed.

From an ante-room to the right of the room in which the sergeant faced his trembling little visitor, there came a scuffling of chairs and a muttering of voices. Three patrolmen, playing cards still in their hands, came to the door of the ante-room to peer out bewilderedly at their sergeant. Right on the heels of the patrolmen was a tall, sharp faced man in civilian clothes. He also held cards in his hands.

"One of you," Desk Sergeant Corbett bellowed at the patrolmen, "take this punk by the collar and thrun him outta here!"

"What's wrong, Sarge?" one of the patrolmen ventured.

"Yeah." It was the lean, tall, sharp-faced civilian, a police reporter from a morning paper, who seconded the query. "Yeah, what's up, Corbett?"

Desk Sergeant Corbett glared at the police reporter. "None of yer business, Gotch." Then to the patrol coppers he repeated, "One of yez thrun this punk outta here!"

But the police reporter, Gotch, had stepped into the room and now advanced toward the white faced little Mr. Hemple. Gotch grinned amiably at the cowering little man.

"What's wrong, citizen?" he asked lazily. "Is Thick Skull here pushing you around?" He jerked his thumb to indicate Corbett.

Mr. Hemple fixed Gotch with a look of thanksgiving and supplication.

"No, sir. No, sir, he isn't. It's just that the officer doesn't understand what

I am asking of him. He thinks I am either being facetious or have lost my mind, which is not at all the case. I am merely begging him to lock me in one of his cells for twenty-four hours."

If Gotch was surprised by this statement, it showed neither in his expression nor his answer.

"Now, that's a reasonable enough request, citizen," he declared, "if you've any cause for making it."

"My name is Harold Hemple," the little man interjected.

"Hemple, then," Gotch said undaunted. "That's a reasonable request, Hemple. What's behind it?"

"He sez," declared Desk Sergeant Corbett, hurling himself back into the conversation, "that he's afraid something—he don't know what—will happen to people—he don't know who—if I don't put him behind bars. He's crazy as a coot!"

Gotch's eyebrows raised a fraction of an inch at this. He turned to Mr. Hemple.

"That true, citizen?" he demanded.

"Mr. Hemple," the little man amended. "Yes. That's precisely what I told the officer."

"Well," said Gotch. "Well, well!"

"Do *you* think I'm crazy?" Mr. Hemple asked the reporter, tears in his squeaking voice.

GOTCH considered this. "What makes you think terrible things you aren't sure of are going to happen to people you've never heard of?" he asked.

Mr. Hemple gulped. It appeared that he gulped the way most people cleared their throats.

"I had that dream again last night," said the little man. "And when I have that dream something dreadful always happens, wherever I am, during the next twenty-four hours."

"I see," Gotch said. "Something dreadful like what, for instance?"

"Like that streetcar wreck the day after I had my last dream," said Mr. Hemple, shuddering.

"What streetcar wreck, citizen?" Reporter Gotch demanded.

"The one out at Twenty-first and State," Mr. Hemple answered. "Just a week ago. The one in which two people were killed when their automobile ran into a streetcar."

Gotch nodded solemnly. "I remember it, citizen. Elaborate. What did you have to do with it?"

Mr. Hemple took a deep breath, half shutting his eyes.

"I was on it," the little guy said. "I was on that streetcar." His eyes opened wide again, and fixed supplicatingly on Reporter Gotch. "See what I mean?" Mr. Hemple asked.

The reporter shook his head. "I can't say that I do. Was it your fault, that accident?"

Mr. Hemple nodded quickly. "Yes; exactly. It was my fault!"

"How?" Gotch asked. "Did you jar the motorman's elbow?"

Mr. Hemple shook his head again. "No. Of course not. I was merely *there,* a passenger on the car, and my very *presence* there caused the accident."

Desk Sergeant Corbett had heard enough.

"Git this loony outta here right now!" he snorted. "I told yez he was crazy!"

Patrolmen Masterson, Carroll and Waterman advanced toward the trembling Mr. Hemple. Reporter Gotch again intervened.

"Aren't you going to hear this citizen's story through to the last gory detail?" he demanded indignantly.

The policemen hesitated, Sergeant

Corbett grew additionally crimson.

"See here—" the desk sergeant began.

But Gotch had turned back to Mr. Hemple, masking his mental smirk with a deadly serious pan.

"Proceed, citizen," Gotch implored. "You were telling us how your very presence caused catastrophe. Does it always?"

"Only after that dream I have so often," Mr. Hemple squeaked despondently.

"Ahhhhh," said Gotch. "Now it all comes clear. You mentioned that your dream brought you here tonight, eh?"

MR. HEMPLE nodded. "That is why I wish to be confined. I have just had my dream again—about ten o'clock—and it woke me in a cold sweat. I dressed, hurrying over here as quickly as I could. You see, from midnight on, I'll be dangerous. It won't be safe for others if I'm at large during the next twenty-four hours. For I've had the—"

"The dream," said Gotch, breaking in. "Yes, I see." He hid a smile by turning his head slightly, then he swung around to face Desk Sergeant Corbett.

"Sergeant," Gotch said, "you've heard the story of citizen Hemple. You realize, consequently, what you'll be doing if you refuse his request for room and board in this louse nest for a day. Do you still refuse his plea?"

"If that loony isn't outta here in the next two minutes I'll throw yez both in the can, smart guy!" Sergeant Corbett exploded.

Reporter Gotch looked pained. He turned to little Mr. Hemple.

"You face intolerance such as would have stymied Edison," he told the little man. "The sergeant is a stubborn man. I'm afraid your request will not be granted, citizen. Perhaps you'd better go back home and chain yourself to the bathtub for the next twenty-four hours."

"But I couldn't do that!" Mr. Hemple wailed.

Reporter Gotch took him by the arm and started him toward the door. Mr. Hemple bewilderedly allowed himself to be so conducted.

At the door Gotch paused.

"Goodnight, citizen," he said. "You did your best, but even Napoleon, confronted by such stupidity—"

Mr. Hemple looked at him with watery gratitude.

"Thank you, sir," he squeaked miserably. "You've been more understanding than anyone I've yet encountered. I'm really grateful for your efforts in my behalf." Mr. Hemple glanced suddenly down at his wrist watch. His face went two shades paler.

"Something wrong?" Gotch asked.

"It's almost midnight," Mr. Hemple muttered frightenedly, his squeaky voice leaping an octave. "I—I must leave. I—I have to do something. Ohhhh dear!"

Gotch nodded in solemn understanding. "But of course," he said. "The curse starts at midnight, eh?"

Mr. Hemple shuddered. "Yes. Oh, my yes!" Then he seemed to remember the reporter. He grabbed Gotch's hand in a grip that was like the soft caress of a jelly fish. "Thank you again, Mr., ah—"

"Gotch," the reporter told him. "Frank Gotch, of the *Daily Blade*. Give me a ring anytime I can help you."

"Oh," Mr. Hemple squeaked, "you are a newspaper person?"

Gotch nodded. "Something like that, citizen."

"Thank you again, Mr. Gotch. Thank you again," the little guy squeaked. Then he turned and hurried through the door. The reporter heard Mr. Hemple's heels clicking fast down

the steps. Then, grinning broadly, Gotch turned back into the room.

"Listen, funnyman—" Desk Sergeant Corbett shouted at him.

"Can it, Sherlock," Gotch smirked derisively. "You are sadly lacking in one very necessary commodity."

"And what," the sergeant demanded with truculent suspicion, "might that be?"

Gotch just grinned. He winked slyly at the patrolmen.

"Come along, chums, you've all got a few pennies left I haven't taken." He started back to the ante-room, the cops following on his heels.

Desk Sergeant Corbett was still muttering when the poker game began again. . . .

REPORTER FRANK GOTCH, of the *Daily Blade,* having since taken the last pennies from the pockets of the night patrolmen at poker, was deeply engrossed in a spicy pictorial magazine called *Ooogle,* some two hours later.

In the room just outside the cubicle where Gotch sat, Desk Sergeant Corbett was also devoting his attention to a perusal of contemporary literature, frowningly scanning a copy of *Racing News,* his lips moving soundlessly as he spelled out the words of more than two syllables.

The Brandon Avenue Station was once again at peace, the brief flurry which had been created by the strange request of the weird little Mr. Hemple practically forgotten.

Behind the boilers in the basement, two patrolmen snored. And in front of the lock-up section, a third officer of law and order tilted far back on his chair, eyes half closed, contemplating a coming furlough and the fishing that would consume it.

Everything was serene.

And then the telephone beside Sergeant Corbett's elbow jangled.

Scowlingly, the sergeant dropped his *Racing News* and snatched the receiver irritably from the hook.

"Hello," he growled cheerlessly, "Brandon Station."

Then he listened, as his fuzzy red eyebrows pleated themselves into twin accordions af disapproval.

"It ain't according to regulations," he mumbled. "He's got a telephone in the reporter's room." There was another pause, then the sergeant sighed. The call was for Gotch, and the sergeant's acute dislike of that reporter was tempered with a sort of fearful regard for that young man's sharp tongue.

The sergeant put down the receiver.

"Hey, Gotch," he bellowed. "Some dame is on the phone and wants yez. She seems excited!"

There was a scramble in the adjoining cubicle, and Gotch appeared. He crossed to the desk and picked up the receiver, turning slightly away from the sergeant as he spoke.

"Hello?"

Sergeant Corbett craned forward, better to hear the conversation. Gotch smirked at him, and the sergeant looked away, flushing.

"That right?" Gotch asked.

"Oh, yeah? You aren't kidding?" the reporter's voice was getting a bit excited. "Sure. Thanks. Hang on, I'll be right there!"

Gotch slammed the receiver into the hook and turned away.

"What did she want in such a hurry?" Sergeant Corbett asked coyly.

"She wasn't a she," Gotch said, scrambling into the cubicle room and emerging with his suit-coat.

"Who—" began the sergeant.

Reporter Gotch was heading toward the door.

"It was little Mr. Hemple," Gotch

shouted over his shoulder. "Maybe you should have locked him up at that!"

THE fire engines were already on hand when Gotch arrived at the address given him by the squeaking, terrified voice of Mr. Hemple. Hoses were strung across the streets, and excited crowds from the houses in the neighborhood were already lining the curbs and walks.

It wasn't a big blaze, inasmuch as it was confined merely to the small all-night hamburger shop, and the shop was located on the corner and separated from other buildings by a wide parking lot. But the intensity of the minor conflagration was something to marvel at. There didn't seem to be a section of the hamburger hut which wasn't engulfed in orange flame.

Gotch found Mr. Hemple standing in front of the drugstore from which he'd telephoned.

The little man seemed shrunken even beyond the reporter's recollection of him. His eyes were still watery, but they were now filled also with fear.

He seemed pathetically eager to see Gotch. And he babbled out his story immediately.

"I just went in for a cup of coffee and a sandwich," he wailed. "That's all I wanted, a cup of coffee and a sandwich. I never imagined anything could happen in there. I wasn't the only customer in there. I imagine three or four others sat beside me at the counter. There was only one man tending the counter, and he was working the grill, too. He'd scarcely brought me the coffee, before *poooooofff!* the entire grill burst into flame!"

"That's how it started?" Gotch demanded.

Mr. Hemple nodded whitely. "And then all of a sudden the flame was spreading everywhere, and the whole hamburger place was afire. The counter man was yelling and trying to put out the blaze, and the other customers were dashing for the door. The smoke was terrible, and I tried to find the counter man, but I couldn't. I finally found the door and staggered out into the street. The counter man must still be in there!"

Reporter Gotch didn't grin at little Mr. Hemple this time. He placed both hands on the practically nonexistent shoulders of the pathetically shaking little fellow.

"Wait right here," he said. "Don't move an inch. I'll be right back." And then Gotch dashed across the street to the fire line, where the battle to control the blaze was still going on.

It took him only five minutes to find out what he needed for his story. The counter man had, as Hemple stated, been trapped inside. They'd brought his body out far too late for pulmotor revival.

Gotch dashed back to Mr. Hemple, found out the precise moment at which the fire started, repeated his instructions to the little man not to leave, and hurried into the drug store.

When Gotch came out he was smiling delightedly, and there was an extremely curious gleam in his ambitious young eyes. He'd scooped this yarn on all the other sheets in town. A small scoop, true enough, but it had been off his beat, and the night editor had been well pleased.

Gotch took Mr. Hemple gently by the elbow.

"Come along, citizen," he said, "I want to have a talk with you. I think we can figure this all out to our mutual benefit."

Mr. Hemple looked at him with mingled hope and despair. His squeaky voice was raggedly pathetic when he answered.

"Oh, do you think so, Mr. Gotch.

Do you *really* think so? It's all so terrible, so impossibly terrible. You have no idea of what I have been through!"

Gotch looked at the little man soberly.

"This sort of thing has happened plenty to you, hasn't it, citizen?" he asked.

Mr. Hemple nodded brokenly. "For the last year, yes. Ever since I started getting those dreams. I dare not think of the catastrophes I've caused so far."

"Well, don't think about it, then," Gotch advised, hailing a passing taxi. "But when we have this talk together, right now, I want you to start at the beginning and spill all."

Mr. Hemple nodded sorrowfully as Gotch pushed him into the taxi.

"Pete's Place," Gotch told the driver. . . .

INSIDE of another hour reporter Gotch was becoming increasingly cognizant of what the strange little man had gone through. They sat together in the back booth of Gotch's favorite bar; Gotch coasting on scotch, and Mr. Hemple working on a cheese sandwich and a glass of milk.

Little Mr. Hemple had started with an enumeration of the dire tragedies for which he considered himself responsible. Tragedies all of which had occurred within the year. And reporter Gotch, being in one sense a keen young man, mentally checked the accounts of these occurrences with his own newspaper knowledge of them, and found the little man to have an amazingly retentive memory concerning the details of the happenings.

And then at length, after his blow by blow account of trouble for which he considered himself responsible, little Mr. Hemple informed Gotch that he would begin at the beginning—that is to say, when the trouble started.

"You see, Mr. Gotch," the little guy told him, "I am, or was, by profession a genealogist, a tracer of family backgrounds and heredity. It has been some time since I have been able to work at my trade, however, due to this frightful situation I find myself in."

Gotch had clucked sympathetically at this, and the little man went on to describe in some detail the exact nature of his work.

"Finally," said Mr. Hemple, "I began, as a sort of side hobby, the most complete genealogical chart ever attempted by one of my profession. I started what I planned to be a complete chart of my own heraldy."

"You mean you wanted to smoke every last ancestor of yours out of the brush?" Gotch had marveled.

"Precisely," Mr. Hemple said. "All the way back to Adam and Eve." He took a gulp of his milk and shuddered. "But I didn't quite get that far," he said.

"I don't get you," Gotch declared. "Elucidate, citizen."

"I was able to trace my descent all the way back into biblical times," Mr. Hemple's squeaky voice declared. "And then I encountered the terrible truth."

"Don't tell me," Gotch grinned. "The first Hemple was a monkey!"

Mr. Hemple looked pained. "I am serious, Mr. Gotch. What I tell you is direly unfunny. *I am a direct descendant of Jonah!*"

Gotch choked on his scotch.

"What!' he demanded.

Mr. Hemple half closed his eyes in agony at the thought, and took a bite from his cheese sandwich.

"Yes," he squeaked between munches, "I am exactly that. A direct descendant of the original Jonah."

Gotch had stopped gaping stupidly. Now he demanded: "You mean Jonah the old double-trouble guy? The chap

who landed in the belly of a whale?"

Mr. Hemple wiped the mustard from the corners of his trembling lips.

"Yes," he squeaked woefully. "I mean exactly that."

Gotch took a reflective swig of his scotch, running his hand across his forehead as if in deep thought. Then he looked up quickly, snapping his fingers.

"Then how come it all started only a year ago?" he demanded. "If you're a descendant of Jonah, you must have been related to the old guy since the day you were born. How come you weren't Mister Trouble from the very start? How come the bad luck held off this long?"

Mr. Hemple shrugged his nondescript shoulders.

"I cannot explain it," he declared. "Except to say that I never *knew* the roots of my ancestry until just a year ago. And I never had my dreams until I learned my tragic heraldy."

Gotch nodded. "Incidentally, what does that dream concern?"

MR. HEMPLE took a strong grip on his glass of milk. He looked right and left, then leaned forward confidentially.

"Whales," he squeaked in a falsetto whisper. "I dream of schools of whales, sporting through billows and blowing water like geysers!"

Again Gotch almost choked on his scotch.

"Whales!" he spluttered. "Well I *am* damned!"

Mr. Hemple nodded wordlessly, taking another sip of his milk.

Gotch regained some of his composure. He wiped his sleeve across his mouth.

"Listen," he asked soberly, "how often have you had these dreams?"

Mr. Hemple thought a minute. "At first, about twice a mouth," he declared. "It was only after about six of these, and the resultant calamity on the day following each, that I began to realize what a dreadful menace I was becoming." He paused for the inevitable shudder. "Then the dreams grew more frequent, and I had them almost every week. For the last month I've had them twice a week."

"Twice a week?" Gotch asked, trying hard to keep the elation from his voice.

Sadly, Mr. Hemple nodded.

"I am very much afraid my curse is approaching some dreadful climax," the little guy said. "I do not know what I can do. I have tried almost everything but suicide."

Gotch downed his drink, raised his hand to the waiter to signal for a refill, and leaned across the table until his face was a few inches from Hemple's.

"Well don't worry about anything any more, citizen," he said. "From now on in, you are under the personal protection of Frank Gotch. I am going to keep you with me, pal, until we lick this curse of yours. And furthermore, I have a few ideas as to just how we can go about beating it."

Tears sprang afresh to Mr. Hemple's moist pale eyes. His adam's apple repeated the darning-egg-in-a-sock routine, and his mouth trembled half in joy, half in sorrow.

"Mr. Gotch," he mumbled, "I—I hardly know what to say. You have already been more than kind to me. You have treated me with none of the scorn and laughter I encountered elsewhere. I appreciate all you have done for me, honestly. Just being able to talk over my problems with another human being who believes them has been a great help. But I cannot impose on you further."

Mr. Hemple, fishing in his pocket, was edging toward the end of the booth.

Gotch reached out and grabbed him by the arm.

"Now don't be silly, Mr. Hemple," the reporter said swiftly. "Think nothing of it. I *want* to help. I *want* to carry you over your tough sledding."

The little guy had found a worn dime in his pocket. Now he put it on the table.

"That is for my sandwich and milk," he explained. "I would like to have been able to treat for your gingerale, but I am somewhat without funds at present."

GOTCH slid out of the booth and stepped around until he stood between little Mr. Hemple and any possible exit.

"Now, citizen," Gotch protested. "That's another reason I want to help. I'll let you have as much as you need for working expenses until we lick your malady and put you on your feet again. Please, it isn't charity."

"Then what is it?" little Mr. Hemple squeaked.

Gotch mopped his brow, thinking desperately, then came up with a strained one.

"Once a guy did a favor for me. A total stranger. He practically saved my life. He started me off afresh. I never forgot it. I vowed to help someone else sometime. That's why I want to help you, citizen Hemple. Why, you even *look* like the guy who helped me once!"

The last sentence seemed to sway little Hemple.

"Really?" he asked.

Gotch nodded solemnly. "That's what I thought the first minute I laid eyes on you." He paused. "So it's all set, then. You bunk in the quarters of the great Frank Gotch from now until we get you straightened out."

Mr. Hemple gulped. "You are so kind," he managed. "So very, very kind."

"Don't be silly," Gotch waved his hand. "Incidentally, you say those dreams have been coming along at the rate of two a week now?"

Little Mr. Hemple nodded. "Yes, and I fear they might grow even stronger later on."

Reporter Gotch turned his face away to hide a grin of sheer exultation. It wouldn't be Reporter Gotch for long. No sir. Soon it would be Gotch The Big Shot. Gotch of the *Daily Blade,* or whatever paper could afford to pay what he would ask. . . .

AS PREVIOUSLY mentioned, Reporter Gotch was a bright young man of sorts. Bright enough to stay out in a cloudburst when it happened to be raining pennies, for example. For Gotch intuitively knew a good thing when—as in the case of Harold Hemple—it walked right up and spoke to him. And bright enough, too, not to question the source of his good fortune, and to make the most of it.

It took merely a month for Gotch to climb from the obscure leg beat at the Brandon Station to a position of some greater importance on the staff of his newspaper, the *Daily Blade.*

A month in which Gotch collected nine scoops on as many dire calamities, all of which, of course, were caused by little Mr. Hemple.

For, from the night he persuaded little Mr. Hemple to permit him to serve as an angel of mercy, Gotch had installed the psychically disturbed enigma in his own room, at his own expense, and launched an arrangement whereby he was always at Mr. Hemple's side during the periods that followed the little man's warning dreams.

Invariably, of course, this placed reporter Gotch immediately at the scene

of some disaster, major or minor, caused by the presence of the strange little troublemaker.

Around the office of the *Daily Blade,* Frank Gotch soon became "Spotnews," Gotch. His forty bucks a week as a legman was raised each week until, at the end of a month, he was making double his original salary.

But Gotch wasn't satisfied as yet. After a particularly juicy scoop which occurred when he had taken Mr. Hemple—on the morning following one of the little man's dreams—down to the docks to watch the boats come in, and had been rewarded by the tragic capsizing of a small passenger ferry, Gotch demanded another kick-up from his editor, wasn't offered enough, and quit.

As he had expected, a rival paper, the *Journal,* hired him instantly at more than he'd asked from the editor of the *Blade,* and Gotch was climbing on up the ladder once more.

All of this took a little less than six weeks. But, of course, a lot can happen in that time. Much was happening to Mr. Hemple, for instance. The little man was taking more and more to black, brooding fits of despondency. Although it hardly seemed possible, the pounds were dropping from his already scrawny frame until he was little more than flesh and bones.

Gotch noticed this, and was smart enough to try to do something about it. He invented vague tales about his efforts to locate the proper alienist for little Mr. Hemple, swearing that all the little man needed was a mental readjustment to eliminate his Jonah-like powers. He jollied, he cajoled, and tried every trick he could think of to keep his good thing alive and ticking.

But little Mr. Hemple continued to decline.

"I can't go on like this much longer, Mr. Gotch," he declared, his squeaking voice a weak shadow of its former self. "You've been a help, yes, a wonderful help and I'm grateful. But when I think of all the misery I cause I can't bear it!"

In a way Gotch felt sorry for the little guy. But only in a way. He knew, for example, that the hell the little man was going through was an understandable one. It was something he, Gotch, would damned well dread facing. But nevertheless, Gotch was a young man with an exceedingly adaptable conscience. He resembled nothing more, morally, than a chameleon.

"It's no fault of mine," the prospering young man told himself. "The little guy would go along the same anyway. So why shouldn't some good come out of his troublemaking? It would happen if I were around or not."

AND with that argument and the hundred and twenty-five dollars a week he was now making, Gotch kept his conscience feathers smoothed. One fact, however, which the young newspaper sensation forgot to face, was that —on the periods following Mr. Hemple's dreams—Gotch quite deliberately selected the ground to be covered during that dangerous twenty-four hours.

It hadn't been accidental that Gotch had suggested to little Mr. Hemple that they walk to the docks on the day the ferry capsized. Nor had it been mere chance that took a hand in the theater fire when Gotch took his dangerous little charge into a crowded cinema on the morning after another one of his warning dreams.

No, none of it had been sheer coincidence. Bright young Mr. Gotch figured that Mr. Hemple might as well cause front-page trouble as well as any other. And he went about skillfully seeing to it that his pathetic little charge did exactly that.

Mr. Hemple, of course, realized that the consequences of his strange affliction were becoming increasingly grave. And no doubt this had much to do with his physical decline and increasingly black despair. But the little man was much too naïve to place the finger of the growing trouble on the man he sincerely believed to be his benefactor.

Another month slipped by in this manner. Another month in which Gotch left the *Journal* to join the *Clarion* at one hundred and seventy-five dollars a week, and to write a by-lined column on the side. This was heaven. Gotch was now a full-fledged columnist. He bought Mr. Hemple a new suit.

And it was that very new suit which caused the outburst of anguish from little Mr. Hemple.

"I am very glad to hear of your good fortune," the little guy had said, near tears, "and I appreciate your wanting to make me this gift to celebrate your luck. But I cannot accept it. I have finally made up my mind. I cannot stay here any longer on your gratuity, Mr. Gotch. I must leave. I *will* leave, this very afternoon."

Gotch hadn't expected this. He started to snap something angrily at the little man about gratitude and the rest of it, until he remembered in time that Mr. Hemple knew nothing of the use to which Gotch was putting him.

So instead, Gotch held his tongue, watching little Mr. Hemple sorrowfully starting his packing, racking his brain for an idea. And then he had his brainstorm. He snapped his fingers.

"I got it!"

Mr. Hemple looked at Gotch perplexed.

"Listen," said Gotch, talking fast, "you're leaving because you feel obligated to me, and that you can't continue staying on under such circumstances, right?"

"That is correct," Mr. Hemple squeaked.

"Okay," said Gotch, "so we'll make it all right, citizen. I'll let you do some work for me. You can be the part time secretary I'll need now that I'm a columnist, and—" Gotch spread his hands wide for emphasis, "you can get right back to your old trade of looking up ancestry. You can start right now on my background. Take it farther back than any of the standard ones. Make a good job of it. I'll be a big shot some day and then I'll need some ancestors to worship." He finished, beaming at little Mr. Hemple.

The little man's face was working. Tears were rimming his perpetually watery eyes.

"Are you sure I would be of use?" he begged. "Are you certain you are not just being kind?"

Gotch slapped the little man on the back. "Don't be silly," he said. "And furthermore, you'll stay right here with me, just like before!"

Little Mr. Hemple looked closer to being almost happy than he had been in quite some time. Noticing this, Gotch mentally patted himself on the back. It was all in knowing how to handle people, that's all, just handling people. Here the little goof had been pining away to nothing, and the thing he really needed most to bring him back on his feet was work.

"Even though he's not aware he's been working for me all along," Gotch told himself. . . .

AND so it was that Mr. Hemple came to work for Gotch both night and day. Night, when he dreamed of whales, and day, when he sorted mail, answered correspondence, and worked slavishly on the Gotch genealogy.

Undoubtedly Mr. Hemple brightened a little, now that he felt himself of

some use. Brightened, that is, on all but the days when he was the cause of grave disasters.

Nevertheless, several weeks passed, with Hemple's physical and mental outlook a bit on the mend, and Gotch extremely pleased about it all.

Several more weeks slid into the files of time, with the situation continuing in its comparatively happier state.

"How's my ancestry coming, citizen?" Gotch would ask cheerfully.

"I found that there was an Earl of Gotch," Mr. Hemple would answer almost happily.

"How're the termites in my family tree?" Gotch would inquire again.

"It seems there was a misunderstanding between the Earl of Gotch and his peasantry," Mr. Hemple reported gravely. "The peasants took him out and hanged him."

"I'll bet he never looked better than then," Gotch told the rather shocked little genealogist.

So it went along pleasantly enough, as said before, for several weeks. Then there came the week of Mr. Hemple's letdown. He had only one dream that week. And Gotch, alarmed, tried tactfully to find the reason for it.

"Maybe," he suggested to little Hemple, "you're working so hard that you sleep more soundly and dream less."

Little Mr. Hemple could only shake his head.

"I really couldn't say, Mr. Gotch," he declared. And inwardly he voiced a prayer that perhaps—

So Gotch cut down on the little man's secretarial work the following week.

But Mr. Hemple unconsciously countered this by spending all his free time on the Gotch genealogy. And again, the little troublemaker had but one dream for the week.

Gotch's sunny disposition showed signs of clouding. He began to worry. The little stinker couldn't let down on him, not now. Not when he was on the verge of the really big time. Gotch got to tossing in his sleep, striving to figure out some manner in which to halt the fifty percent letdown in little Mr. Hemple's dream quota.

There was yet another week in which the little genealogist had but one dream, and by this time Gotch was almost frantic. He saw to it that Mr. Hemple ate the most impossible diet combinations known to man. He purchased a psychology text on the meaning of dreams, and in at least a dozen ways he tried to stimulate Mr. Hemple back into his old two-dreams-a-week status.

But it didn't work. Not for that week.

And on the following week, Hemple had no dreams at all!

Gotch came close to losing his sanity. He so forgot himself as to berate poor Hemple over the lack of his customary phenomena. And the little genealogist, stunned by his benefactor's lack of enthusiasm over what seemed to be the last vestiges of a dreadful curse, retired to his study in a sick sort of daze.

And Gotch realized instantly that he'd put his foot in it, that nothing on earth could keep Hemple from getting wise to what had been going on. Promptly, therefore, Gotch went out and got very tight.

WHEN Gotch reeled back into his apartment it was considerably past midnight. But the lights in the living room and in Mr. Hemple's bedroom were on. And in the living room, Gotch saw Mr. Hemple's luggage.

Unsteadily, Gotch made his way into Hemple's room. The little man was just in the process of snapping his last suitcase closed. He wore his hat.

"Show!" Gotch glared blearily. "Washing out onna one pershun inna

worl' whoosh ever done anyshing for yuh!"

Mr. Hemple eyed Gotch sadly.

"You are in no condition to remember what I tell you, Mr. Gotch," he said. "But I will say, nevertheless, that your perfidy in using my affliction to your great advantage has stunned me. I could think of nothing more contemptible. I have reason to hope that my strange Jonah-like powers have more or less evaporated themselves. Consequently, you could find little more use for me here. I believe our bargain is an even one."

And with his squeaked exit line, Mr. Hemple turned and left the room.

Gotch watched him leave between half-lidded eyes. He swayed uncertainly from side to side.

"Damned ingrashe!" he muttered. "Don' needja anymore anyway!"

And then Gotch sat down heavily on the edge of the bed, his head pillowed in his hands. He was vaguely aware that he was drunk, very drunk, and that the room kept spinning most damnably.

Half a minute later Gotch was snoring—out quite cold.

It must have been fully five hours later when Gotch woke up. And then he knew his head was splitting, and that he'd gotten drunk, and that with harsh words of some sort, the now all-knowing Mr. Hemple had marched out on him. He'd had a terrible nightmare.

Gotch felt suddenly ill, and he rose swiftly from the bed and started out the door for the bathroom. He passed his study on the way, saw the light burning and the door ajar, and risked one quick investigation before continuing on to the bathroom.

There wasn't anyone in the study, but a huge scroll, perhaps fifteen feet long, lay spread across his desk and the floor of the study. Gotch looked at it distastefully. The genealogy the little ingrate had been compiling, the Gotch genealogy.

Gotch started to turn away to resume his trek to the bathroom when his eye caught the bottom of the scroll, and the big, black-lettered name concluding it.

"JONAH" the letters read.

And underneath, written in a fine, precise hand, Hemple's hand, was scrawled, "Mr. Gotch: Jonah had numerous descendants. You are one of them also. H.H."

Gotch made a face.

"The little fool," he muttered. "Who in the hell does he think he's kidding?"

He moved back into the hall and walked unsteadily into the bathroom. And it was at precisely that moment that Gotch recalled the terrible nightmare he'd had just an hour or so ago.

It had been about whales, schools of whales, sporting through billows and blowing water like geysers!

Gotch felt suddenly especially ill. He grabbed the handle of the medicine cabinet and started to open the door. At that instant the entire cabinet came loose with his tug, crashing down atop Gotch and washbowl as bottles of various medicines and multicolored tinctures shot every which way.

Gotch sprawled backward, his feet shooting out from under him, and his head cracking hard against the radiator directly behind him, as his spine jarred hard on the tile flooring.

He had a wild instant of confusion, sickness, and pain. But that much was minor to Gotch. The dread that came in the next instant was worse. The dread that Mr. Hemple's strange affliction might well have been contagious, and that the "Jonah" at the bottom of his ancestry chart was not fictitious. For after all, there'd been the dream of whales, and—

"Oh God," Gotch groaned dismally, "is this the way it starts?"



A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Young Cyrus proved the truth in the old adage, but Sammy supplied the antidote

SAMMY CALLS A NOOBUS

by HENRY A. NORTON



"Oh, Cyrus," cried Sammy. "Applethauth!"

"STAND still, dear, so I can brush your hair."

Sammy Fellows stopped trying to scratch his right leg with his left toe, and began an investigation of his loose tooth. It waggled fine. He opened his mouth and pointed for his mother's edification.

" 'Oose too' " he remarked.

"Yes dear," said Mrs. Fellows in her listening - but - not - paying - attention voice. Then immediately, "Why, Sammy! That's the tooth we just paid the dentist five dollars to fill! And you're losing it!"

Sammy stood silent while his mother finished putting a detested curl in the front of his hair. He wondered just what she expected him to do to keep from losing a tooth. Gee whinnikers, he thought, he'd *tole* her not to have it filled. He didn't like going to that ole dentist!

"Sammy, I want you to be nice to the Widdicombe boy this afternoon. No fighting, now."

"What's a Widdicombe, Ma?" Sammy asked.

"That's his name, Cyrus Widdicombe. We're going to call on them for tea."

Tea meant cookies, maybe jam muffins. But Sammy didn't like the sounds of a kid named Cyrus Widdicombe. He sounded like an awful sissy.

"I bet ole Cyrus is fulla applesauce," he ventured.

He got what he expected, a swat in the pants, but Ma never hit very hard when she was calling him Sammy. It was the Samuel swats that really hurt.

"You be good," she commanded. "And stop saying 'applesauce' to everything."

"Okay, Ma," and Sammy headed doorward.

"Sammy!" Oh-oh, here it comes. "Sammy, what have you got in your pockets?" Sammy returned reluctantly. That was no question to be answered

on the spur of the moment. That called for inventory.

Marbles. Half an apple. String. A stub of pencil. A dead mouse (confiscated). A lopsided baseball. More marbles. A slingshot (confiscated). Four nails. A rubber band. Marbles.

"Better than I expected," said Mrs. Fellows, "Now don't go away. We're leaving in a few minutes."

THERE was something exciting about the outside of the Widdicombe house. It gave Sammy the same pleasant vacant feeling in his stomach he usually experienced just before one of his favorite Western movies. There was nothing in the appearance of the house to account for the feeling, but there was nothing on the outside of the Bijou to hint of the delightful screen adventures within, either. The Widdicombe house was tall and thin, scarred by weather and shabby as to paint. A broken shutter in the third story gave the face of the building an unexpected and quite malevolent leer.

Cyrus Widdicombe's appearance was a rude shock to Sammy's hope for an exciting afternoon. Cyrus wore a neat Eton collar, his shoes were properly shined, and—final badge of conformity—he wore dark rimmed glasses. They shook hands appraisingly, and Cyrus gained a notch in Sammy's estimation by deftly shifting his grip forward to avoid having his fingers squeezed.

"Your work must be fascinating, Professor Widdicombe," Mrs. Fellows was saying in her this-is-somebody-special voice. "Or maybe I just think so because our family name used to be Faroes. Not *your* Pharaohs, of course but like the islands."

The brilliant Egyptologist murmured something vague and returned to his book, while his spouse took up the social burden.

"It's practically the same thing, I'm sure, and how interesting. Cyrus, you may show your little friend your things. Samuel, isn't it? In this way, Mrs. . . ."

The boys moved carefully out of earshot, eyeing each other.

" 'At's a sissy collar," said Sammy Fellows.

"My mother makes me wear it," Cyrus admitted. It was the proper riposte, and he followed it with a full and knightly thrust of his own. "That's a sissy curl."

"Yeah," said Sammy. "Ain't women funny?"

They were on good terms at once. Sammy displayed his loose tooth, pointing out the filling, and Cyrus contributed an impressive wart. They settled down to an amiable discussion of things to do.

"You wanna fight?" asked Sammy politely.

"They'd hear us," Cyrus objected.

"Besides, you got glasses," Sammy said. "Twenny-fi' dollars if you hit a guy with glasses."

"Who said?" Cyrus's scientific curiosity was piqued.

"Everybody knows that," said Sammy largely. He added an elaboration of his own. "You give it to the guy, to get a new pair of glasses."

Cyrus felt the honors were getting out of his hands. He played his largest trump.

"There's a dead man in our attic," he said.

Sammy's eyes got round. "Applesauce," he managed.

Cyrus paused, enjoying his sensation to the ultimate. "It belongs to Pop," he added. "It's from Egypt."

"Did your old man kill him?" Sammy asked in awe.

"Of course not—it's a mummy. It's been dead for a long time. Besides, he isn't my old man. He's my Pop."

"He's an old man, ain't he?" Sammy demanded. "And he's yours, ain't he?"

THEY scrambled up the dusty stairs to the attic, minimizing the clatter of sturdy shoes on the echoing boards. The door creaked impressively as they entered. The attic was dry and airless, crowded with packing boxes and family lumber, filled with unexpected shadows. Their voices had a muffled sound, and the rafters whispered their words back to them. It was altogether a fearful, wonderful place.

Even more wonderful was the big oblong box. They lifted off the tight-fitting lid, and peered curiously at the linen-swathed form within. *No wonder the guy's dead,* thought Sammy. *He must of been in an awful wreck, with all those bandages.*

He poked the still and unresisting shape, and its dry crackle made the back of his neck feel tight and cold. the word 'mummy' meant nothing to Sammy. This was simply a very dry and crackly dead man, and he must never talk about it, or the police might put old man Widdicombe in jail.

"Look at all the books," offered Cyrus.

Sammy left off pinching the swathed arm, and went over to the cases of curious rolls and books. They didn't look very exciting. Most of them were on old yellow paper that looked as if it would crumble, but surprisingly didn't. He picked up one with a picture of a beetle on it. Maybe it was a comic about a man who turned himself into a gold and green bug and chased down enemies. But it wasn't—it was filled with lines of wedge-shaped things that looked like you could read them, only they weren't real letters.

"That's the Book of the Dead," said Cyrus.

"His book?" asked Sammy with a glance around.

"That's its name," Cyrus explained. "I can read it."

"Applesauce," said Sammy scornfully.

"I can so. Pop showed me how to pronounce it, only I don't know what the words mean. Want me to show you?"

He took the screed from Sammy's hands, and began to read in a level singsong voice. The words were strange ringing sounds that didn't make sense, but they gave Sammy a vague feeling of disquiet. He grabbed at the parchment. It tingled in his hand, and he released it hastily.

"It gimme a shock," he said accusingly. He called on the lore he had stored up when Daddy stuck his hand in the light socket. " 'Lectricity. There's a short in it."

"This is magic stuff," said Cyrus. "Pop says if a child of the Pharaohs could stand in the King's Chamber and read this, he could call up Anubis."

"What's a Noobus?"

"I'm not sure," admitted Cyrus. "But I know what a King's Chamber is."

"Sure, but who'd stand in one?"

"Not that kind of a chamber, dopey. Look."

CYRUS searched for something to mark with, and Sammy dug in his bulging pockets for a nail. Cyrus traced in the dust of the attic floor. A long line sloping downward; a shorter, angled line; a dip; a rise; a little square. Then above the square, another line that led up into a larger square. A simple diagram, but its pattern was cut in stone—cut in musty stillness and eternal night in the heart of a vast symmetrical pile of stone, half a world away. Cyrus pointed to the larger square.

"That's the King's Chamber."

"Applesauce," said Sammy.

"It is so!" said Cyrus.

"Prove it," Sammy said. He didn't particularly care, and was surprised to hear his voice go on saying, "Prove it, prove it, prove it." Like an echo, only getting higher and thinner with excitement.

Cyrus hesitated. His father had told him not to play in the attic, and if he did, not to play with the books, and if he did, not to read them aloud, and if he did, not to read them aloud when someone else was present. But this was a special case. This was being polite to a guest.

"I don't know if I can," he said.

"I dast you," Sammy chanted. "I double dast you."

That settled it. "You have to stand in the square," Cyrus directed, "and say it after me, just like I read it. Only if you hear anybody coming, stop quick."

Sammy put his scuffed shoes in the square. He didn't like the way he felt, sort of hot and excited, and he wished he hadn't dared Cyrus, but it was too late to back out now, and his head felt funny and dizzy and Cyrus was beginning to read and he heard his own voice following in a queer choked treble that sounded like it was coming from inside a great stone room in some dark and secret place.

Sammy didn't know the reeds were whispering along the Nile, and in the ruined temple at Karnak the desert whirlwinds spoke in small dry voices, telling that Anubis the Jackal God was stirring. In the great cave of the North, Fenris the Wolf moved drowsily and felt his chains loosen as his brother gathered power. For Sammy, little Sammy Faroes, stood in the King's Chamber, and his voice was chanting an age-old litany. An ancient prophecy was unfolding, and the vast, obscenely-shaped hosts of evil were waking, watching, waiting for the moment of deliverance.

THE two boys looked at each other in awe, and looked back at the big gray thing that flopped feebly on the floor in front of them. It was a man part of the way up, and then it stopped being a man and was a big dog-looking thing with pointed furry ears and long teeth. It was trying to open its eyes.

"What do we do now?" whispered Sammy.

"We have to exorcise it, quick," said Cyrus.

"It looks kinda sick, awright," Sammy agreed.

"If you exorcise it, it goes away," said Cyrus.

"Something about a missile half living and half metal and the names of the greater gods."

"Is it really a Noobus?"

"Sure it's Anubis. We better exorcise it, quick."

Its eyes were open now. The repetition of its name was but another step in the spell the Adepts of Egypt once knew. It sat on the floor and blinked yellow eyes at Sammy. Something more was needed.

Sammy blinked doubtfully back. This gray thing didn't look any too friendly, with its animal head and shoulders. A lambent flame was in those flickering eyes, at once so ardent and so cold he could remember having seen nothing else like it. The thing had a musty smell, too, that made him think of things long dead. But Sammy wasn't going to let Cyrus Widdicombe know about his doubts. He went up and took the lean gray hand.

"Get up, Noobus," he said.

The God Anubis rose. The Lord of Darkness and of Souls, after thirty centuries of bondage, raised his eyes to

look upon the moted sunlight filtering through a window—felt beneath his feet the solid substance of men's dwellings. Into that cosmic mind long dormant came flooding again the arts of its godhead. A fragment of the ritual he had known so long ago, whispered itself—and the God Anubis knew that if he could but enter into the body of this mortal who had called him from the tomb, he could bring the powers of Hell to walk again upon the earth!

The monstrous thing was losing its grayness now: Sammy realized, as form and color crystallized, that it had been gray only because he had been looking through it in some odd way—seeing the shape and at the same time seeing the familiar attic behind it. The creature opened its fanged jaws, and its voice was deep chiming that spoke a foreign tongue, curiously one that Sammy could understand. It was like hearing two radios playing at once on different stations. He could hear the strange words, incomprehensible, and at the same time their meaning rang in his head. Honeyed words, lulling, promising.

"Come with me now, Master of the Inner Chamber, that my people may see thy face all glorious. Set thy feet upon the necks of thy slaves, upon the thousands and the tens of thousands."

"Where'd you come from?" asked Sammy directly.

THE response was instant, breath-taking. Sammy caught a glimpse of Cyrus' white face upturned, falling away beneath them. Then he and Anubis stood on the stream of a towering wind, breathing the heady upper air like wild eagles in flight. Below their spurning feet a patchwork quilt unrolled, the lands and seas of the world. Sammy wanted to shout; he wished desperately that his Ma could see him! Flying! Like he had in his dreams, flying!

The dizzy whirling pace of the earth slowed, over a flat and barren wasteland. Wide and forever it stretched, rolling to the copper sky—dotted sparsely with the green of oases. Now there were pyramids below, and a crouching monster of stone. Anubis pointed with a lean hand, and Sammy's spine prickled at the plangent intensity of his voice.

"Seest thou, Master, the lands of thy creation? The nourishing river, and the unconquerable desert? It was here that thy arts were born, that the sacred lore of an Adept was given to thy hands."

He thinks I know more'n I really do, thought Sammy.

Then they were going down, dizzily down above the spectral ruins of a great, lost temple, and forth to meet them came the heart-stopping, ineffable majesty of ten thousand voices massed in mighty chorus. They were the voices of the dead, and their chant was the timeless Hymn to the Dead.

Where the lights flickered dimly before an ornate time-stained underground altar, and the faces of the thousands were a field of ashen flowers, Anubis stretched out his hand to Sammy. In it was the writhing head of a serpent, the uraeus of the Egyptian gods, symbol of power incredible.

"Take it, Master," he said coaxingly.

Sammy's mouth puckered. "No," he said.

The jackal lips curled back. "Take it, Master."

"I do want it," Sammy said.

The sound of the sighing dead was as a great wind. Unless the mortal took the sceptre willingly in his hand, Anubis could not gain possession of his body. The shining eyes of the monstrous evil

host followed intently, as a stubborn little boy backed slowly away before the dreadful Jackal God.

"Take it, Master of the Inner Chamber!"

Sammy's jaw set obstinately. That was a castor-oil voice if he ever heard one. Besides, this dog-faced thing was acting a little too smart.

"Take that away," he said sharply. "Down, Noobus!"

He gestured with his hands, and the hellish faces below the altar faded, and the moaning voices faded, and again the rushing wind was a platform for them, above the clouds.

"I want to go home," said Sammy.

"Observe," the Jackal God said softly. "With the power of the uraeus, anything is possible."

HE POINTED with the serpent wand, and the tumbling clouds were split by a great flash of fire. He pointed again, and drew a rolling path of flame across the desert far below. He pointed upward, and the heavens shuddered and roared.

"Take it, Master," he urged. "Use its power."

Sammy wasn't listening. He had seen a movement on the desert far below, and at the half-formed wish in his mind, they hovered above the scene.

"Lookit," Sammy said excitedly. "Tanks fightin'."

"The pass of Halfayum," said Anubis.

They looked like queer scarabs, scuttling across the brown sands. Their flashes of fire were faint and toylike. Sammy made out the flags at last. The hooked cross of the Axis flew from the overwhelming force to the west, and the pitifully few defenders were falling back before them.

"That ole Hitler's winnin'," said Sammy.

Anubis waited.

"Somebody oughta help them fellers out."

Anubis waited.

"Gimme that snake," said Sammy. The uraeus twisted in his chubby fist and blazing, unearthly fire marked and scarred a straggling line across the desert. Sammy yelled in excitement as the swastikas vanished, as the tanks that bore them vanished. As the last enemy tank licked out in flame, Anubis reached and took the serpent wand in his hands. His eyes blazed with triumph, and the chorus of the Hymn to the Dead rose appallingly in their ears. There was a roaring of wind.

They were back in Widdicombe's attic, and Sammy knew at once that their positions had changed. Anubis was no longer a queer, helpless half-man. He was a raging, terrible incarnation of evil. The fires of hell blazed in his yellow eyes as he advanced toward Sammy. Sammy backed slowly away, until the hard press of boards against his back told him he could retreat no more.

"Lay down, Noobus!" he said. "Go 'way, Noobus!"

The spectral form of Anubis was gray again, a swirling cloud of elemental hate in front of Sammy's eyes. His breath was hot and gritty as the Khamsin that blows from the desert. The jackal face was alight with unholy victory, and he moved surely toward this frail gateway to a helpless, unsuspecting world.

ANUBIS flicked the uraeus gently, and Sammy's head snapped back from the blow. He spit blood into his hand, and felt his tooth come out. He clutched it in a hot fist. It had cost his Dad a lot of money. Besides, if he put it under his pillow tonight, the fairies would take it and leave a shiny dime in its place.

"You better quit that," he told Anu-

bis, and his voice broke a little. The missing tooth made him lisp. "My uncle 'th a politheman!"

It was only a little lie, for Uncle Dan once tried to join the police force. Besides, Sammy needs all the help he can summon. Sammy stands in the breach now, and the walls are going down around him. That faltering curl his mother fashioned so lovingly is an oriflame now, for the helpless little people of the world. Throughout time the dead are stirring, and their eyes burn through the ashen form of Anubis. Sammy is the world's last hope now, and Sammy isn't very big.

Implacable hate beat him down with the force of a physical blow. Sammy's sturdy, scratched legs buckled slowly under him. He raised his eyes, hot with unshed tears.

"Thcram!" he said stoutly.

He hated this wicked, undead thing for making him want to cry. He hated its choking musty smell, and the gibbering phantasmagoria of evil that clung behind it like a cloud, swirling faces that blotted out the homely attic shapes and crowded close to the grinning jackal outline of Anubis. The flapping horror of it touched him.

He yelled in rage. "Applethauthe!" He hurled his precious tooth at the Jackal God's face, and winging terror cleared the lisp from his desperate cry. "Oh, Cyrus!"

It was written in the book of Thoth when time was young . . . "Strike the Lord of the Dead with that which is half living, half dead, calling the names of the great gods." A filled tooth, half living tissue, half dead metal, struck and hovered at the gray cloud, while the rafters were still whispering back Sammy's cry, the syllables, "Thoth . . . Osiris" . . . names of the great ones. The room cleared, and was still, in obedience to an ancient exorcism. For a second a fine, impalpable dust hovered above the mummy case; then it too was gone. The tooth dropped with a tiny sound.

Sammy was recovering his tooth when Cyrus poked his frightened head through the attic door. He had made surprisingly good time, considering that he had to crawl out from under a bed before coming up the stairs.

"Where is he?" he whispered.

"He went away," said Sammy, inspecting the tooth for damage. It seemed a little black, but sound.

"Gee!" The tone was an accolade. "You exorcised him!"

"Well, we exercised each other," Sammy said.

"DID you have a nice time, dear?" asked Mrs. Fellows, clashing the gears a little as she started the car. It was her way of telling if the motor was running.

"Awright," Sammy answered inattentively. He had the car radio on, and was listening to an exciting news account of an Axis panzer force demolished at Halfaya Pass. It seemed the tanks had exploded during the battle, and ersatz material was being blamed. He thought of asking about the meaning of 'ersatz', but decided it would be useless, since he didn't quite know the meaning of 'demolished'.

"I was really quite surprised in Professor Widdicombe," his mother continued, carefully avoiding a taxi. "For such an intelligent man, he certainly had some wild ideas. Imagine saying the people of Egypt knew things we don't know today! What did you play, Sammy?"

"Magic," said Sammy.

"Just the kind of thing I'd expect a child of Professor Widdicombe's to play," said Mrs. Fellows. "When I was a girl, we played games like Pum-



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pum-pullaway, or Run Sheep Run, or Washington Punch. What was your game like, dear?"

"Like movies, only you do it," Sammy explained, reassuring himself that the tooth was still in his pocket.

His mother leaned toward him and sniffed. "Sammy, you've got a funny smell about you," she said. "You haven't gone and got another mouse, have you?"

"No ma'am," said Sammy.

"You sure?"

"Yes ma'm," said Sammy.

"Well, I'm glad you enjoyed yourself," his mother went on brightly. "You did have a nice time, didn't you?"

"I druther play ketch," said Sammy.

He decided to put the tooth under his pillow, and see if there was a dime next morning. It usually worked better if he announced his intention clearly at the supper table, he'd noticed. He guessed maybe he was getting too old to believe in junk like fairies.

PUTTING BEES TO WORK IN RUSSIA

IN THIS war, Russia has lost a good deal of her fertile farm lands as well as farm laborers who have gone off to fight or work in war factories and therefore Russian scientists have been thinking up ways to increase the output of Russian farms without the labor and lands available.

One of the methods evolved is that of putting honey bees to work on the farm at a new job in addition to that of producing honey. The new job is performed at the same time the honey is being gathered. These scientists have revealed that a crop can be increased if the hees can be made to carry the pollen from one flower to another while they are looking for honey. However, certain vital crops in Russia have never heen tempting to the honey bees who pass them and thus the maximum possible yield is not produced. These non-tempting crops were determined by experiment and observation and Russian scientists extracted the syrup of the flowers in these crops and put the young honey hees on a strict diet of this syrup. In a short time, the bees developed a taste for this new type of syrup and when they were released they sought the new delicacy in the fields. First results showed an increase in crop yield by this new method.

READER'S PAGE

WE'LL TAKE CARE OF IT

Sirs:

The Octoher issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES was very good! "The Mystery of the Lost Race" takes first place with Wilcox's "Leopard Girl" close behind. The front and hack cover superb. But, my main reason for writing is that my last four issues are falling apart for lack of staples, please put tbree staples in if this is at all possible.

RAY. O'CONNOR,
77 Stockton St.,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

We're glad the October issue pleased you so well. Thanks for letting us know about your magazines coming apart. We don't know whether our fans are so interested in commenting on the stories that they just overlook mentioning anything about issues coming apart, or if they have never had the experience, however, we've had very few complaints, but will do our best to see just exactly what can be done to keep the magazines in good shape.—ED.

COMPLAINT REGARING BURROUGHS

Sirs:

Regarding your October issue, "Mystery of the Lost Race" was fair altbougb some might have found it interesting. "The Leopard Girl" was perfect. "Union in Gehenna" was better then the usual run of stories. "Corporal Wehber's Last Stand" was good. "Double Trouble for Oscar" was very good. "Jerk the Giant Killer" was corny. "The Devil's Lady" was ahsolutely swell. "Mr. Throop's Incredible Hand" was interesting and different. "The Empress of Mars" was excellent.

I have one complaint that may astound you. I have long read stories by an author who is supposed to he superb and is superb in his way but his stories take up too many pages and don't have enough adventure. The author is E. R. Burroughs.

As a whole I like FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and AMAZING STORIES very much, in fact I just went out in the pouring rain to see if any new issues had come in.

GEORGE ESSAYIAN,
3110 Bailey Ave.,
The Bronx, New York.

Yes, George, your one complaint does astound us! We think there will be quite a number of readers who won't exactly agree with you.—ED.

A NEW FANTASY FAN

Sirs:

I just started reading fantasy magazines a few months ago and I've tried nearly all of them, but FANTASTIC ADVENTURES beats them all. The stories in the August issue (first F. A. I read) were swell and tbe pictures were pretty good. I rank the stories in this order:

1. "Daughter of Thor." First place for being different and interesting. 2. "Son of Death." Very good—could come true. 3. "Tink Takes Command." A delightful tale. 4. "Tbe Little Man Who Wasn't All There." Ranks with "Tink." Very Good. 5. "Kid From Kalamazoo." Good stuff. Original. 6. "Mr. Ames' Devil." Okay. 7. "Luck of Enoch Higgins." You could have picked something better. 8. "The Mental Gangster." Fair, but gangster stuff doesn't interest me. 9. "Creegar Dares to Die." Ugh! Terrible! I later read O'Brien's "Living Mannikins" in the Fall Quarterly and it was very good, so mayhe Creegar was just an accident.

I like the idea of tbe quarterlies and I'd love a reissue of tbe May, June and July issues in a quarterly (or was there one I missed?).

The August cover really deserves praise, for looking like what it was supposed to be.

Good luck to a swell mag.

NORMA JOSEPH,
251 W. 81st Street,
New York, New York.

Always glad to welcome new fantasy fans in our midst, Norma. Yes, there was a reissue containing the May, June and July issues. It was the Winter Quarterly which went on sale October 2nd. If you can't find it, 35c sent to our Circulation Director, will bring you a copy.—ED.

MAGARIAN IS "TOPS"

Sirs:

I'll string along with Roland Bern in saying that Magarian tops Finlay, and he's getting better all the time. If it's possihle, I would like very much to have one of his originals.

Here's my rating of the October FANTASTIC:

1. "Union in Gehenna."
2. "Jerk, the Giant Killer."
3. "Mr. Throop's Incredible Hand."
4. "Double Trouble for Oscar."
5. "The Empress of Mars."
6. "Mystery of the Lost Race."
7. "The Leopard Girl."

Prostatitis?



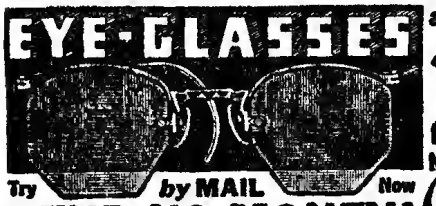
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8. "The Devil's Lady." Ah!!! Magarian.
9. "Corporal Webber's Last Stand."

EUGENE A. RICHARDSON,
624 S. Fulton Ave.,
Baltimore, Maryland.

It's easy to see how much you think of Magarian. We're pretty proud of HER ourselves! And we have a number of stories at work at the present time around Magarian illustrations—which should keep you happy in future issues.—ED.

HIS FIRST FAN LETTER

Sirs:

This is the first time I have written to your magazine although I have been a faithful reader for some time. Here is my opinion of the stories in your Octoher issue. Some may violently disagree with me, hut of course everyone is entitled to their own rating.

1. "Mystery of the Lost Race." Let's have more of that guy Jarvis. He has a definite knack. 2. "The Empress of Mars." Say what happened to Ross Rocklynne? I consider his stories in the immortal class. 3. "The Devil's Lady." Let's have more of Clark South—a delightful short story! 4. "Union in Gehenna." I fell in love with Petegone from the first. 5. "The Leopard Girl." Pretty good but not up to Wilcox's high standard. 6. "Mr. Throop's Incredible Hand." A fine yarn. 7. "Double Trouhle for Oscar." 8. "Corporal Webber's Last Stand." LeRoy Yerxa writes darn good stories for a newcomer. 9. "Jerk, the Giant Killer." Not as good as some of Bloch's yarns.

I hardly ever see a letter from anyone in Texas. Come on Texans wake up!

JAMES W. BENNETT,
Box 652,
Edna, Texas.

At last you're seeing a letter from a Texan, James, even if you had to write it yourself. Ross Rocklynne will be back with us very shortly with a swell novel.—ED.

WANTS "MEET THE AUTHOR"

Sirs:

Just got through reading the November issue of my favorite magazine, and I think it's great! "After an Age" was one swell novel, and that short story about the dinosaur running amok at a Hollywood premiere, by Emil Petaja, was sure a wonderful whopper! More like it, huh?

By the way what's become of your page "Meet The Author"? It used to give a fellow a more intimate friendly feeling toward the guys who dish out our particular brand of reading.

PVT. FRANCIS HANSON
No address

Sorry, about the "Meet the Author" page being missing in the last few issues. However, last minute insertion of ads upset this feature. But, it will be back regularly in future issues except when authors in the book have already been presented, or no pic is immediately available.—ED.

WANTS MORE NOVELS

Sirs:

This is a commentary on your November issue. One word describes it! Super!!!

How all those fine science fiction stories got into a mag with the name of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is beyond me, but keep it up.

Do I like the novel? When your novel is Bond, or anyone of his catagory, you need to ask me?

Please, if it's between serials and novels lets have novels and this one was fine.

Your stories rate with me thus—

1. "When Freemen Shall Stand." More-More-More. P'raps a sequel? 2. "Shayla's Garden." Okay. Don't agree with me. Good fantasy. 3. "Sharheau's Startling Statue." Okay. I was an outcast anyway. 4. "Picture of Death." A non-humorous McGivern, an' how!! 5. "Tireless Leg." Not exceptional, but somehow I liked it. 6. "Feep's Opportunity." Keep Feep. 7. "Talu's Fan." More from Cabot! 8. "Plot of Gold." Good humor. 9. "Stygian Terror." Cohlentz—u-m-m-m-m.

The September issue of AMAZING was swell, keep up the good work.

The Romance of the Elements is a fine feature, and I learn lots from it. Your features are fine, and look at your cover. Can you furnish a time-table for the Rocket to Venus?

Back cover by Paul? Well you probably told 'im to draw it but—Paul!!

Yours—humbly hoping you receive, like, and print these words I stand—breath hated.

JAY CHIDSEY
Green Springs, Ohio

More novels by Bond, or those equally as good. O.K. If that's what you want that's what you'll get.—ED.

WILLING TO BE REGULAR SUBSCRIBER

Sirs:

My father and mother own a grocery store in which we sell magazines. One day not long ago the magazine man came in carrying a hundle of new mags. I happened to he in the mood for reading so I looked through these. I ran across the November issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. I read all the stories in this issue and wanted more, hut I didn't want to wait a whole month for the Decemher issue.

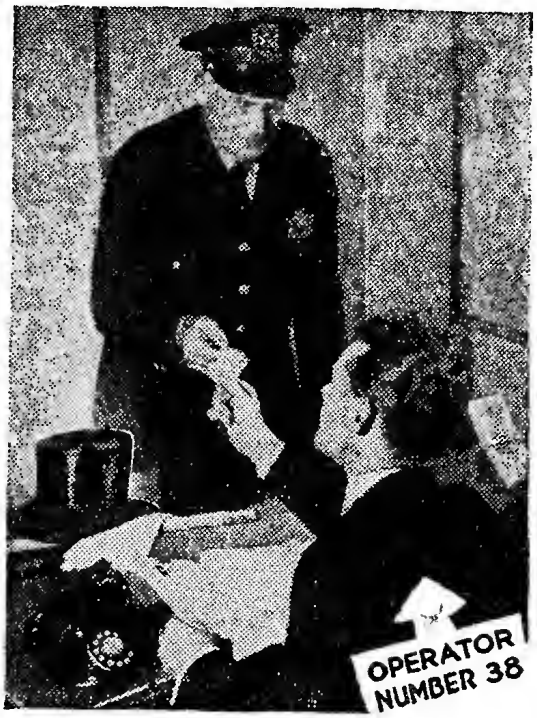
Not long after I ran across a friend who gave me a large stock of old issues of FA to read. I am still reading and enjoying every story. I don't know whether I should try to appraise your Novemher issue or not hut—

I thought Bond and his story "When Freemen Shall Stand" was tops. No kidding. I really mean it. You have a swell author and he seems to have some swell stories.

I didn't know what I was getting myself into when I started to read "The Golden Opportunity

Arrest Him, Officer!

I'LL HAVE COMPLETE FACTS ON THE OTHER FELLOW TONIGHT!



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of Lefty Feep." Since then I have read five more of his stories. Would like to see one every month from now on as I wouldn't miss FA for the world.

I thought "The Picture of Death" and "Talu's Fan" by McGivern and Cabot were pretty swell.

After reading the whole book I thumbed through the reader's page and correspondence corner, but I stopped thumbing and read in earnest to see what other opinions were. I am dropping you a line and expressing my opinion also.

Your covers are very good especially the back. You have some good artists who know what they are doing.

If every FA magazine has as good stories as your November issue, there is no reason why I shouldn't be a regular subscriber.

PAUL KINNEY
1119 Washington Ave.
Wenatchee, Wash.

Keeping you happy shouldn't be a difficult job. We will try to keep every issue of FANTASTIC *just as good as the November issue. We'll also try to give you a "Feep" story each month. It wouldn't be a bad idea for you to look over our companion magazine,* AMAZING STORIES, *since you have such easy access to it anyway. We're pretty sure you'll be anxious to be a regular subscriber to* both *magazines.*—ED.

COVERS AND ILLUSTRATIONS RATE HIGH

Sirs:

November FANTASTIC ADVENTURES was one of your best issues to date and it maintained its place as the best in fantasy fiction this month as usual.

McCauley dispalyed his finest painting so far in this issue. As I recollect, he painted another cover of a "women of another planet," namely, the one for "The Druid Girl." Glad to hear he's back again. I hope this time it's for good.

Paul is getting better on every cover, so it seems.

The articles were, as usual, exceedingly complete and concise.

"When Freemen Shall Stand," although written in the identical scene and surroundings as two of Bond's earlier works about "Meg, The Priestess Who Rebelled," incorporated a novel and very welcome twist in the plot.

Lefty Feep was even better than usual, which is going some. How about a story where he meets a leprechaun?

"Talu's Fan" was one of the best fantasies I've ever read. Cabot is good at this type of story. "Shayla's Garden" was one of Swain's best works. "Plot of Gold" though short had a swell idea which was well carried out. "The Stygian Terror" is the type of humorous fantasy which is enjoyable though not silly. "Sharbeau's Startling Statue" was a disappointment. I never thought fantasy would come to this!

McGivern writes swell humorous stories, but I

didn't enjoy "The Picture of Death" so much.

"The Tireless Leg" was a little wacky to say the least.

Fuqua certainly proved that he can do "other world inhabitants" without fear of rivalry, except perhaps St. John.

Will Panak certainly overjoyed me by returning after his long absence.

Magarian was swell. She sure can draw women.

Jay Jackson should stick to charcoal drawings because this type doesn't do him justice.

Covers and illustrations influence a reader greatly when he is contemplating purchasing a book, so keep up your excellent standard.

JACK FORTADO
Box 314
Rodeo, California.

That's our aim, Jack. We try to give you the best in covers and illustrations. We're glad to know just what our fans think of them.—ED.

STIRS THE IMAGINATION

Sirs:

I'm getting sick and tired of hearing the complaints on the reader's page. If they don't like this and that about your mag, why do they buy it? No one compels them, I'm sure. Don't let them try to kid you. They know its so darn good, they just can't resist it!

Surely there's enough squabbling and warfare in fiction and reality to content them without fussing over a defenseless mag.

I like it, and I've made up my mind to defend it for once and for all.

There's one thing I can't understand. I read your stories for pleasure, then I worry and wonder for hours after. The stories make you think.

Your mag is the type that spawns genius. I often find myself wishing I knew enough to make a ray gun of some type. But I'm a poor, ignorant homemaker. The things I invent are good to eat or nice to wear. That's as far as it goes.

So come on, all you people with excellent thinking caps. The country needs new inventions of reality. Work out that experiment you've been thinking of. Maybe it's just what we need to win the war more quickly.

Of course, I realize you can't please *all* the people all the time. But here's *one* you can please forever. Especially with stories by Don Wilcox. Don't ever let him get away from you.

MRS. WONZA SIMMERS
21 N. Stricker St.
Balto, Md.

Such fine loyalty to our magazine makes us proud as punch. Who knows? Perhaps one of our readers will really make a name for himself as you suggest. As you say, science-fiction does stir the imagination.—ED.



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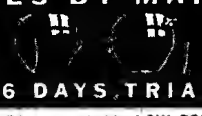
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ENJOYMENT RECEIVED

Sirs:

Two years ago I didn't know there was such a thing as science-fiction although I have been a real fan of Edgar Rice Burroughs for years.

Then I heard that E. R. B. was putting some stories in a magazine called AMAZING STORIES. So I bought them to keep up on his stories. Now I know what science-fiction is. Since then I have haunted used book stores until now I have every issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES ever published and every issue of AMAZING since Ziff-Davis took reins. And I buy each one of the two each month.

In your column and in Discussions I have heard of this author and that and this story and that, which were tops in years gone by. This makes me mad because I know these stories are in existence and still I can't get hold of them. Each time a story or author is mentioned I write it down to see if I can find it or anything by that author. Old timers have had the luck to read the old ones and still can read the new, but we younger readers have to be content with what is published now. Not that it isn't good, it just riles me to know that there are S.F. stories I can't read. Your idea for publishing an old story in each issue of AMAZING really made a hit with me. And now that I will be able to read the "New Adam" after going crazy looking everywhere for it makes me almost jump all over the house with joy. All the power in the world to you, because you give me so much enjoyment.

TONY RICCARDI
537 West 105th St.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Giving you greater enjoyment is our pleasure too. If there are any particular old classics you would like to see reprinted let us know. We can't make any definite promises, but if there are enough requests and the book or story is still available, we can try.—ED.

LOUD PEEP ABOUT FEEP

Sirs:

I have a gripe!!

About two weeks ago I am sitting at a drugstore when I notice a new copy of your magazine. Now it was a new copy with a fair drawing by McCauley and a lousy rear cover. But, however, since I am a F.A. fan I sink a two-bit piece on the counter and strike out for my abode. I read all the stories and I will tear them apart later. I had just finished reading a fair story when I am suddenly slapped in the pan by one of the Lefty Feep stories. Phew!!! It (and the rest of the Feep stories) smell suspiciously of Damon Runyan, and not even a good imitation at that. Puleeze, no more corn. I can't stand it. The rest of the stories are some good and some bad. I rate them this way:

1. "When Freemen Shall Stand." This is a very good story. Plenty good.

2. "Talu's Fan." This is also a good story It

is a lot different from the regular run.

3. "Shayla's Garden." The girls certainly get around. One has a fan and the other a garden.

4. "The Picture of Death." A fair story but not too good.

5. "Sharbeau's Startling Statue." It's pretty rare but I think the statue should be in the garden with the fan.

6. "The Stygian Terror." What a solution to the rubber problem.

7. "The Tireless Leg." 8. "Plot of Gold."

9. "The Golden Opportunity of Lefty Feep." Censored. Oh well, they all can't be good but you can do better than that.

JOSEPH HARPER
1619 R St., N.W.
Washington, D. C.

Come on, fans, what do the rest of you think about Lefty Feep? Poor copy of Damon Runyan or favorite character of Robert Bloch? Confidentially, we like the guy.—ED.

MORE LEFTY FEEP

Sirs:

Since I have never before written to a mag, I don't know exactly what to say. So I'll take the magazine from cover-to-cover. A swell front cover illustration. McCauley is sure living up to the rest of the book.

"The Ghost That Haunted Hitler" was timely, but not very fantastic. Is this a fantastic mag, or a super-duper thriller? McGivern kinda fell down on that one. He can do better than that.

"Lost City of Burma" was swell. Orchids to Hamilton.

"Lefty Feep and the Sleepy Time Gal." Lefty heads my list any old time. Good for Bloch! One swell writer.

Congrats and thanx for the re-issue of FA favorites. It was swell for an interlude between issues.

Just to prove what a wallop this FA packs, a friend of mine was kidding me about reading them. He claimed they were a lot of stuff and nonsense. So what? So I sent him an issue with instructions to read it. Now he's a devoted FA fan, too.

I'm not going to say anything about your inside illustrations because I don't care about them. I'm only interested in the stories. Yours for more of Lefty Feep, and a larger mag.

JACK HARVEY
642 Linden Ave.
Portsmouth, Va.

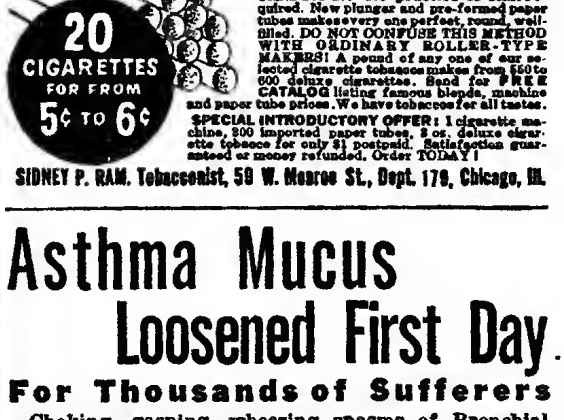
Here's one of the many letters in favor of Lefty Feep.—ED.

LIKES FILLERS

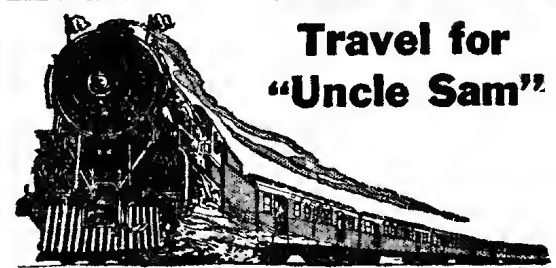
Sirs:

Though not much of a hand at "writing the editor," I thought I might tell you that one of the features I enjoy most is the group of odd facts tucked away as space fillers on various









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pages. Being an advertising man, I often get ideas for new slants—especially on the radio—from these footnotes. (But no, I don't plagiarize them!) Also, my wife, who never heard of science fiction until a couple of years ago, finds them interesting.

FRANCIS WILSON POWELL
2400 Valley View Drive
Los Angeles, Calif.

So many of our readers have written in telling us how much they enjoy these odd bits of information from here, there and everywhere. And we have no objection at all to authors using them as basic ideas for stories.—ED.

ANYONE RECOGNIZE THIS ONE?

Sirs:

There's a classic reprint I've wanted to see for years, because the original story left such a mark on me.

I can't remember the year of publication, name of story, or of author, so you see what I feel in even bringing up the subject—an utter fool! But the story ran about ten years ago in the Los Angeles Examiner's "American Weekly Magazine." The talk, and discussion, and even hot-headed argument this story caused was the earmark, even then, which proved this story to be a superclassic. Therefore, I must at least attempt to offer it up for candidacy, and hope you can reprint it in your magazine. It should be as fine a story now as it was then.

The plot was startling. A wrecked ship—a boatload of babies flung up to safety on an uninhabited island. The way they developed a language from the baby talk of several different languages. The way they somehow lived and grew; the intelligence and leadership of the man who had the spark, and how this became a quarrel between the factions of good and evil; how the first babies were born and the young mothers fed them bananas, which killed them; how marriage and divorce, and many minor problems were settled.

This all made good reading once, and will again. I'm sorry not to have the name, but I am really depending much on the fact that an editors' memory for such things might well exceed mine. And also that an editor's ability to locate such things as an unnamed, long-forgotten story without an author, is usually greater than one might believe.

So now, all I can do is wait, and hope you'll remember the story, and that soon, very soon, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES will present it again. And this time I'll hang on to it!

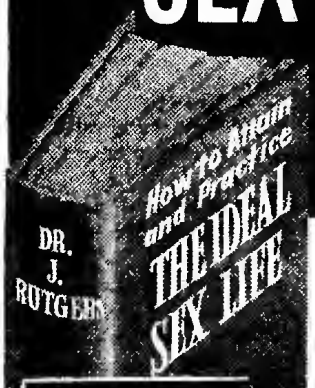
G. CUNNINGHAM
no address.

The story sounds good, but this editor can't recall it. Perhaps some of our readers can help us out, though. How about it, readers? Can any of you inform us as to the exact identity of the story?—ED.

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MERCURY, God of the Winged Sandals

by MORRIS J. STEELE

Because Mercury was fleetest of the gods, he became man's symbol of speed and energy

MERCURY is a fraud, an imposter, a thief. He is actually just another name for Hermes. It happened when Rome suffered a scarcity of grain just after the Tarquins were driven out. These were very unsettled times, and as is usual among common peoples, they blamed the gods, or rather the lack of them, for their misfortune. Thus, Hermes, the Greek god, was borrowed, given a new name, and given the job of "taking the rap" for the sad condition business in general was in.

In 495 he was introduced in Rome under the Italian name of Mercurius. A temple for him was erected on the Aventine, where it became a sort of headquarters, or one of the original "pits" of a grain traders' exchange. Very soon, he became worshipped by traders in general, and was adopted as "general caretaker" of expediting of goods, of that trend of events called "the breaks," and of good trading in general.

The fifteenth of May (the ides) became the day of worship and festival for him. May was chosen because Maia was identified with her namesake, the mother of Hermes.

The importance placed on Mercury by the traders of Rome is evidenced by the fact that in art, he holds a caduceus and a purse (which is very rare in Hellenic representations).

The business quarter of every town had its statue of Mercury, and the water of the sacred spring near Porta Capena was used by merchants for a lustral rite.

Because of the confusion resulting from the theft of his character from the Greek god, Hermes, Mercury was given a pair of sandals to indicate his speed on foot, which actually he never had. He certainly never was given to speed in bis transportation of grains, since most of this was by ox-cart, and by galley.

He became the master of transportation, and no merchant would arrange to transport any goods without first propitiating Mercury and asking his assistance and benevolence.

All commerce came to know Mercury as a symbol of accomplishment. He lived on in the minds of man to become the symbol for wireless, radio, all types of communication. Even the Bell Telephone company pays tribute to Mercury and calls upon him to safeguard and speed the messages that go over their wires.

Aviation took him to its bosom, and the giant ships that now flash through the air hold Mercury as a symbol.

Streamlined trains owe their fleetness to his power and guidance.

Mechanical energy of all kinds is symbolized by the god with the winged sandal, by the winged helmet, by the caduceus and the purse.

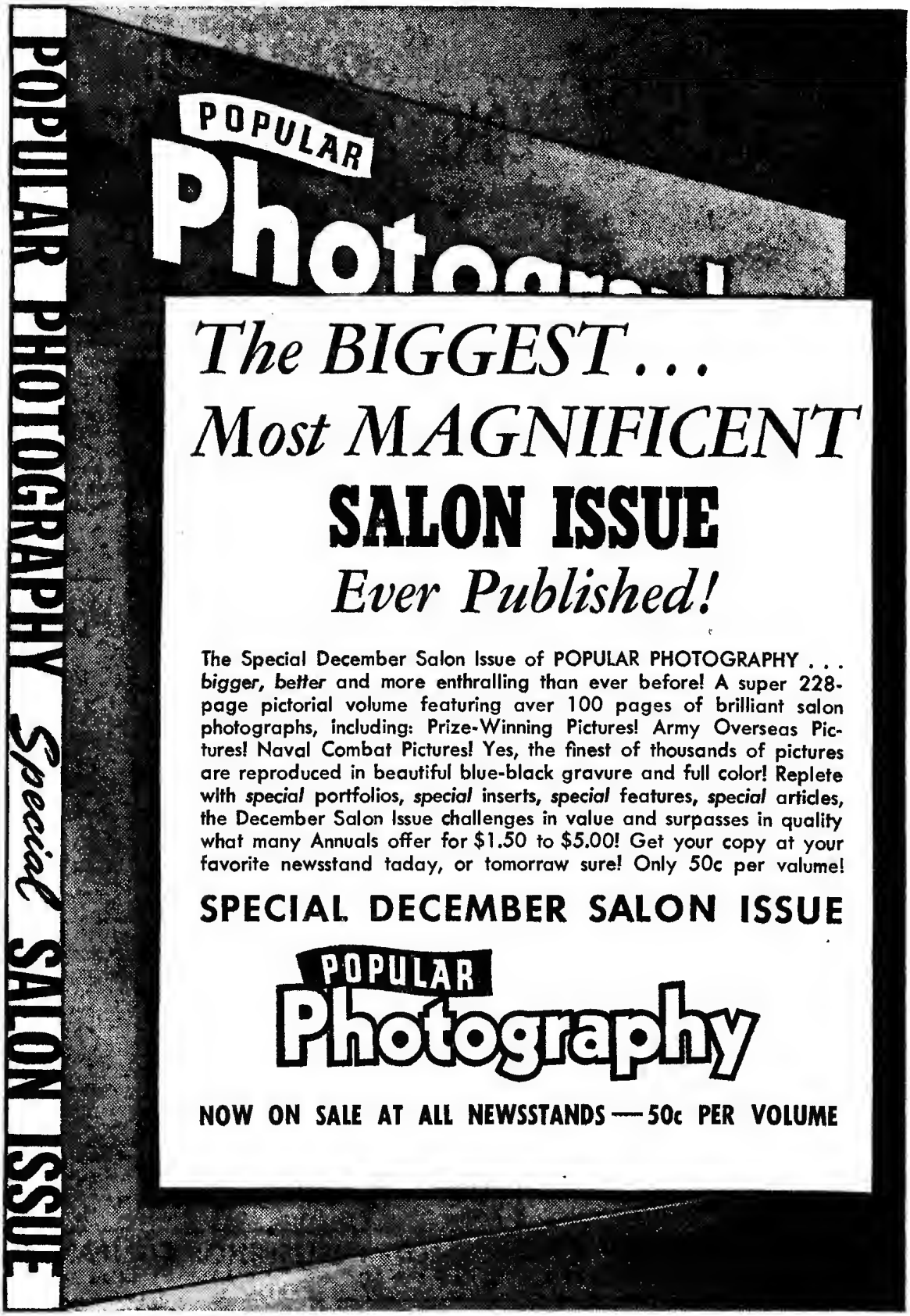
Physically, Mercury was a handsome lad. He was not the hurly athlete, the wrestler, or the fighter. Mercury was given more to flight than to battle, and because of his speed, he never lost a fight. He was slim and wiry and well proportioned.

Truly he has capitalized on his stolen identity, while Hermes as the true speedster, has been relegated to the status of a mere sprinter.

Very often, he became a ghostly apparition to the "ancient" mariner, or the traveler on lonely roads, occupied in conveying a precious cargo from one place to another. Many sea captains returned from an especially stormy voyage attended by great danger with thrilling stories of the appearance in the stormy sky of the fleet-footed god, with his winged sandals, to guide the ship through to its destination; or appearing on a rough and difficult road to pull and push the carts along with the very strength of his presence.

Of all the Roman gods, Mercury is perhaps the only one who never had any semblance to a human form, nor masqueraded on earth as a human being. He was not a man grown to god's stature, nor yet a god come down to earth in man's guise. He was definitely and completely, from the very heginning, a spirit, a symbol, an invention.

Had the Romans not suffered the consequences of great internal strife after they drove out the Tarquins, Mercury would never have been born. Actually, he cannot be called a "god," although the more simple of the tradesmen soon considered him as such and diverted him from his original purpose, as a sort of trademark, and began to worship him.


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Marriage based on mutual love and co-operation—instructions for performing and following marriage sex program—chart of safe periods—normal frequency of relations.

Chapter 4—Functions of Organs
The purpose of sex—how conception takes place — secondary stimuli zones — attaining highest pitch in compatibility.

Chapter 5—The Art of Married Love
The importance of preparation—first act the courtship or love-making—second part of the Coitus—many positions possible—final act or climax—half hour all too short for courtship—develop mutual sexual rhythm—reaching a climax together—women often unsatisfied—problems of physical mismatching—overcoming difficulties.

Chapter 6—Secrets of Sex Appeal
What does a man notice—how to dress for charm and appeal—choosing clothing, attending to complexion, figure and personality.

Chapter 7—Dangers of Petting
Is it wise to pet to be popular? —Embracing bodies and kissing lips dangerous?—yearning desires difficult to control.

Chapter 8—Choosing a Mate
Why children resemble ancestors —importance of selecting proper life's partner—choose a mate for more than physical reasons.

Chapter 9—Birth Control
A moral issue long debated—arguments in favor and against limitation of children—mechanical contrivances against law—various methods used—no method ideal.

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Chapter 11—Fertilization
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Chapter 12—Pregnancy
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Chapter 13—How Tests for Pregnancy
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Chapter 14—Can Sex of Unborn Child Be Chosen
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Chapter 15—Motherhood
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Ed Tomaszewski, 214 E. 19th St., New York, N. Y., would like to buy "Swords of Mars" by Edgar Rice Burroughs. . . . Leon Crumley, 401 Menlo Oaks Dr., Menlo Park, Calif., 13 years of age, is very interested in science and science-fiction. He is anxious to correspond with boys 12 and 13 years of age in Canada, Eastern United States and other countries. . . . Don Grant, 69 Stamford Ave., Providence, Rhode Island, has many S.F. and Fantasy books autographed by H. P. Lovecraft for trade or for sale. . . . Miss Lucetta Bemis, R. No. 2, Allegan, Micb, age 17, is willing to trade A.S., and F.A. magazines, stamps, post cards, pencils and match folders. Also, would like correspondence with anyone anywhere. Is interested in joining a fantastic or inter-steller club. . . . George Bonpas would like to correspond with anyone interested in metaphysics and related subjects. . . . John Moran, 2223 E. 30th, Tulsa, Oklaboma, interested in everything and will answer all letters. He would like to correspond with members of either sex between the ages of 16 and 22. . . . Charles Miller, 202 East 115 St., New York, N. Y., would like to correspond with all interested in physic research such as Hypnotism, Spiritualism, Witchcraft, and any other Black Magic. . . . James Wenz, 513 Moore St., Baraboo, Wisconsin, 19 years old, H. S. grad, interested in astronomy, radio and stamps, wants someone who has covered the sci-fict. field to advise him what to read. . . . Science Fiction Fantasy Review came out for the first time Sept. 20, cost 5c. Address Louis Lippie, 801 Lynn St., Essenville, Mich., mag. reviews, story, pics, editorials, etc. . . . P. F. C. Anton D. Johnson, Co. A. 81st QMBN, Fort Custer, Mich., 22 years old, 5′ 8″ tall, hazel eyes, 155 lbs, has been in the army two years, would like to correspond with any girl. He will send his picture. . . . George Bonpas, Box 13, Alameda, Calif., 27, 6′ 2″, 200 lbs., interested especially in metaphysics, pbilosopby, science, and the imaginative, will correspond with all readers. . . . Miss Mary E. Laffert, Sassaquin Sanitarium, New Bedford, Mass., is interested in photography and many other things, dotes on science-fiction, particularly AMAZING STORIES. Is recuperating following a back operation. . . . Betty Baldwin, Sea Cliff, Long Island, wants to correspond with some one who lives out side of New York State. Wants pen pals fifteen years or older. . . . Joseph M. Vallin, Jr., 2929 Ordway St., N. W., Washington, D. C., wants to obtain "The Master Mind of Mars," "A Fighting Man of Mars," "Pellucidar," "Tanar of Pell," "Back to the Stone Age" all by Edgar Rice Burroughs. . . . Fred Classen, 978 Woodyenest Ave., Bronx, New York City, has for sale a large collection of stf mags and books. . . . Robert Richel, 12-13 Ellis Ave., Fairlawn, N. J., wants to state that the correspondence club be attempted to form will not be formed due to lack of response. He still desires to hear from anyone anywbere about anything. He is interested mainly in chess, Spanish, chemistry, electro-physics, black magic and science fiction books and discussions thereof. He will answer all letters. . . . Ronald Colby, Jr., 307 So. Doheny Dr., Beverley Hills, Calif., interested in photography and wants pen pals. Girls 16 or over are urged to write. . . . Robert Galluzzo, 6201 N. Legett Ave., Chicago, Ill., is 19 and interested in science-fiction, aviation, flying models, etc., and stamp collecting. He is anxious to correspond with boys or girls and will answer all letters the same day. Has a large collection of comic mags, will swap for books and mags by E. R. Burroughs. . . . Tom Ludowitz, 2310 Virginia, Everett, Wash., is sending out free a complete list of books by Burroughs and many other SF authors. All new prices. . . . Charles Kimball, 215 Clarkson Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., age 22, 6′ 1″ tall, 195 lbs., wants to correspond with ladies from ages of 18-45. He likes horseback riding, opera, and symphonic and classical music. . . . William Adams, 690 Gypsy Lane, Mt. Lebanon, Pittsburgb, Pa., wants to correspond with anyone having "Tbrough Space to Mars," and "Tbe City Beyond the Clouds," or "Five Thousand Miles Underground." . . . Harry J. Condiles, 240 Oak Street, Hamilton, Ohio, wants list and price of any one having Burroughs' books. . . . Fred K. Ordway, 2929 Ondway St., N. W., Washington, D. C., would like to obtain books and stories by E. R. Burrougbs, whether in book or magazine form. . . . Howard Moore, 5141 Hamilton, Detroit, Mich., wants to hear from anyone who has personally had an experience with ghosts, the supernatural, mental telepathy, and other phenomena. He is 17 and president of the S. B. I. . . . Pvt. D. Blumberg, Co. G 15 Reg., Fort Monmouth, N. J., wants to correspond with girls 17 to 19 in any part of the continent. He is interested in baseball and all sports, reading and popular music. . . . Miss Anita R. Schulz of 522 Torrance Court, Lansing, Mich., wishes to organize a correspondence cluh for service men. Will all service men wanting correspondents write to her, giving name, age, description, and information which will help her to find a suitable correspondent from her files. . . . J. Nitka, 430 E. 9th St., New York, has a set of Carl Claudy books and a number of Burroughs that he would like to sell or trade. Also Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar." . . . C. W. Philpot, 326 College Place, Laurens, S. C., is interested in bome movies and pbotograpby. . . . Emanuel Andrews, 7304 Tioga St. (8), Pittsburgh, Pa., would like to correspond witb boys and girls and enlisted men. He is 13 years old.

THE END



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